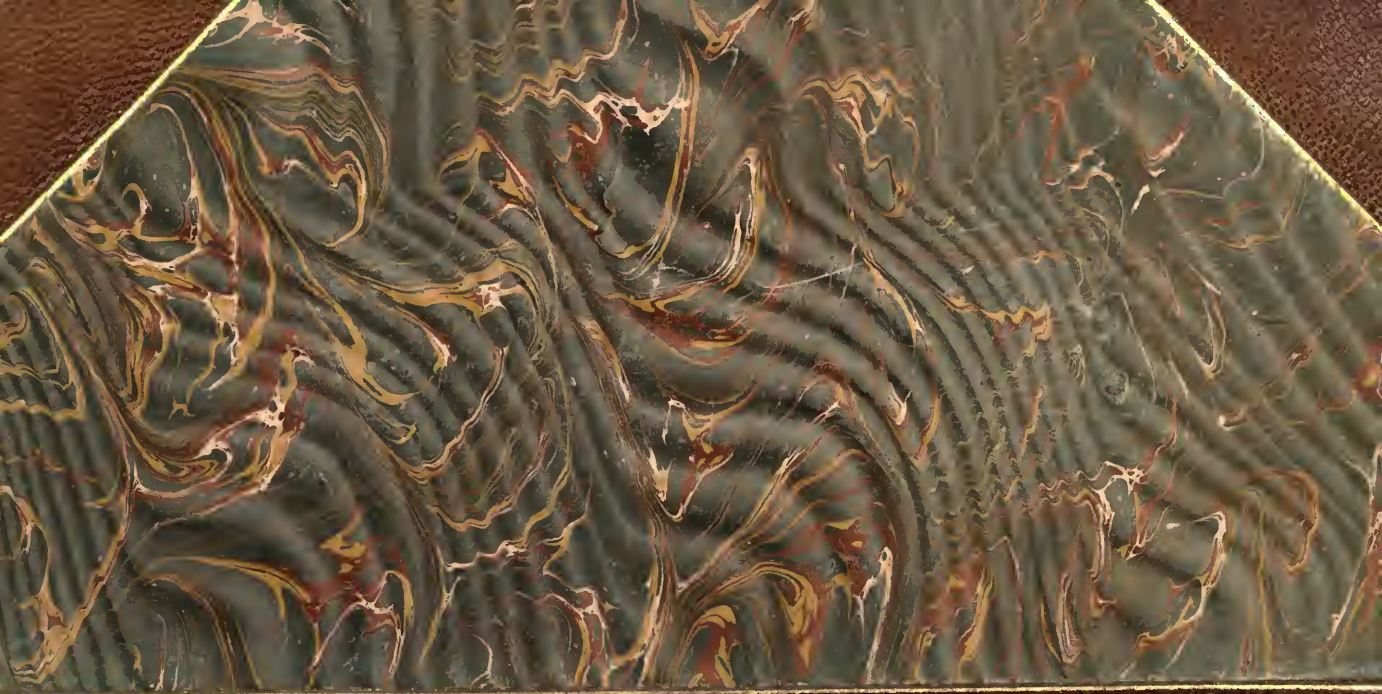

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GEORG EBERS

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IN THE FIRE OF THE FORGE

THE HISTORICAL ROMANCES OF
GEORG EBERS

IN THE FIRE OF THE FORGE

A ROMANCE OF OLD NUREMBERG

TRANSLATED BY
MARY J. SAFFORD

D. APPLETON AND COMPANY
NEW YORK AND LONDON
1892

At the Window.

Photogravure from a painting by E. Nitzky

At the Window.

Photogravure from a painting by E. Nizcky.

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VOLUME ONE

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Dedicated

TO MY BELOVED BROTHER

Dr. MARTIN EBERS

1710132

IN THE FIRE OF THE FORGE.

CHAPTER I.

On the eve of St. Medard's Day in the year 1281, the moon, which had just risen, was shining brightly upon the imperial free city of Nuremberg; its rays found their way into the street leading from the strong Marienthurm to the Frauenthor, but entrance to the Ortlieb mansion was barred by a house, a watchtower, and—most successfully of all—by a tall linden tree. Yet there was something to be seen here which even now, when Nuremberg sheltered the Emperor Rudolph and so many secular and ecclesiastical princes, counts, and knights, awakened Luna's curiosity. True, this something had naught in common with the brilliant spectacles of which there was no lack during this month of June; on the contrary, it was very quiet here. An imperial command prohibited the soldiery from moving about the city at night, and the Frauenthor, through which during the day plenty of people and cattle passed in and out.

had been closed long before. Very few of the worthy burghers—who went to bed betimes and rose so early that they rarely had leisure to enjoy the moonlight long—passed here at this hour. The last one, an honest master weaver, had moved with a very crooked gait. As he saw the moon double —like everything else around and above him—he had wondered whether the man up there had a wife. He expected no very pleasant reception from his own at home. The watchman, who—the moon did not exactly know why—lingered a short time in front of the Ortlieb mansion, followed the burgher. Then came a priest who, with the sacristan and several lantern bearers, was carrying the sacrament to a dying man in St. Clarengasse.

There was usually more to be seen at this hour on the other side of the city—the northwestern quarter—where the fortress rose on its hill, dominating the Thiergartenthor at its foot; for the Emperor Rudolph occupied the castle, and his brother-in-law, Burgrave Friedrich von Zollern, his own residence. This evening, however, there was little movement even there; the Emperor and his court, the Burgrave and his train, with all the secular and ecclesiastical princes, counts, and knights, had gone to the Town Hall with their ladies. High revel was held there, and inspiring music echoed through the open windows of the spacious apartment, where the Emperor Rudolph also

remained during the ball. Here the moonbeams might have been reflected from glittering steel or the gold, silver, and gems adorning helmets, diadems, and gala robes; or they might surely have found an opportunity to sparkle on the ripples of the Pegnitz River, which divided the city into halves; but the heavenly wanderer, from the earliest times, has preferred leafy hidden nooks to scenes of noisy gaiety, a dim light to a brilliant glare. Luna likes best to gaze where there is a secret to be discovered, and mortals have always been glad to choose her as a confidante. Something exactly suited to her taste must surely be going on just now near the linden which, in all the splendour of fullest bloom, shaded the street in front of the Ortlieb mansion; for she had seen two fair girls grow up in the ancient dwelling with the carved escutcheon above the lofty oak door, and the ample garden—and the younger, from her earliest childhood, had been on especially intimate terms with her.

Now the topmost boughs of the linden, spite of their dense foliage, permitted a glimpse of the broad courtyard which separated the patrician residence from the street.

A chain, which with graceful curves united a short row of granite posts, shut out the pedestrians, the vehicles and horsemen, the swine and other animals driven through the city gate. In contrast with the street, which in bad weather resembled an

almost impassable swamp, it was always kept scrupulously clean, and the city beadle might spare himself the trouble of looking there for the carcasses of sucking pigs, cats, hens, and rats, which it was his duty to carry away.

A young man with an unusually tall and powerful figure was standing in this yard, gazing up at a window in the second story. The shadow of the linden concealed his features and his dress, but the moon had already seen him more than once in this very spot and knew that he was a handsome fellow, whose bronzed countenance, with its prominent nose and broad brow, plainly indicated a strong will. She had also seen the scar stretching from the roots of his long brown locks across the whole forehead to the left cheek-bone, that lent the face a martial air. Yet he belonged to no military body, but was the son of a noble family of Nuremberg, which boasted, it is true, of "knightly blood" and the right of its sons to enter the lists of the tournament, but was engaged in peaceful pursuits; for it carried on a trade with Italy and the Netherlands, and every male scion of the Eysvogel race had the birthright of being elected a member of the Honourable Council and taking part in the government of Nuremberg.

The moon had long known that the young man in the courtyard was an Eysvogel, nor was this difficult to discover. Every child in Nuremberg was familiar with the large showy coat of arms

lately placed above the lofty doorway of the Eysvogel mansion; and the nocturnal visitor wore a doublet on whose left breast was embroidered the same coat of arms, with three birds in the shield and one on the helmet.

He had already waited some time in vain, but now a young girl's head appeared at the window, and a gay fresh voice called his Christian name, "Wolff!"

Waving his cap, he stepped nearer to the casement, greeted her warmly, and told her that he had come at this late hour to say good-night, though only from the front yard.

"Come in," she entreated. "True, my father and Eva have gone to the dance at the Town Hall, but my aunt, the abbess, is sitting with my mother."

"No, no," replied Wolff, "I only stopped in passing. Besides, I am stealing even this brief time."

"Business?" asked the young girl. "Do you know, I am beginning to be jealous of the monster which, like an old spider, constantly binds you closer and closer in its web. What sort of dealing is this?—to give the whole day to business, and only a few minutes of moonlight to your betrothed bride!"

"I wish it were otherwise," sighed Wolff. "You do not know how hard these times are, Els! Nor how many thoughts beset my brain, since my

father has placed me in charge of all his new enterprises."

"Always something new," replied Els, with a shade of reproach in her tone. "What an omnivorous appetite this Eysvogel business possesses! Ullmann Nützel said lately: 'Wherever one wants to buy, the bird* has been ahead and snapped up everything in Venice and Milan. And the young one is even sharper at a bargain,' he added."

"Because I want to make a warm nest for you, dearest," replied Wolff.

"As if we were shopkeepers anxious to secure customers!" said the girl, laughing. "I think the old Eysvogel house must have enough big stoves to warm its son and his wife. At the Tuckers the business supports seven, with their wives and children. What more do we want? I believe that we love each other sincerely, and though I understand life better than Eva, to whom poverty and happiness are synonymous, I don't need, like the women of your family, gold plates for my breakfast porridge or a bed of Levantine damask for my lapdog. And the dowry my father will give me would supply the daughters of ten knights."

"I know it, sweetheart," interrupted Wolff dejectedly; "and how gladly I would be content with the smallest——"

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* Play upon the word. *Vogel* means bird.—Tr.

"Then be so!" she exclaimed cheerily. "What you would call 'the smallest,' others term wealth. You want *more* than competence, and I—the saints know—would be perfectly content with 'good.' Many a man has been shipwrecked on the cliffs of 'better' and 'best.'"

Fired with passionate ardour, he exclaimed, "I am coming in now."

"And the business?" she asked mischievously.

"Let it go as it will," he answered eagerly, waving his hand. But the next instant he dropped it again, saying thoughtfully: "No, no; it won't do, there is too much at stake."

Els had already turned to send Kätterle, the maid, to open the heavy house door, but ere doing so she put her beautiful head out again, and asked:

"Is the matter really so serious? Won't the monster grant you even a good-night kiss?"

"No," he answered firmly. "Your menservants have gone, and before the maid could open—— There is the moon rising above the linden already. It won't do. But I'll see you to-morrow and, please God, with a lighter heart. We may have good news this very day."

"Of the wares from Venice and Milan?" asked Els anxiously.

"Yes, sweetheart. Two waggon trains will meet at Verona. The first messenger came from Ingolstadt, the second from Munich, and the one

from Landshut has been here since day before yesterday. Another should have arrived this morning, but the intense heat yesterday, or some cause —at any rate there is reason for anxiety. You don't know what is at stake."

"But peace was proclaimed yesterday," said Els, "and if robber knights and bandits should venture—— But, no! Surely the waggons have a strong escort."

"The strongest," answered Wolff. "The first wain could not arrive before to-morrow morning."

"You see!" cried the girl gaily. "Just wait patiently. When you are once mine I'll teach you not to look on the dark side. O Wolff, why is everything made so much harder for us than for others? Now this evening, it would have been so pleasant to go to the ball with you."

"Yet, how often, dearest, I have urged you in vain——" he began, but she hastily interrupted:

"Yes, it was certainly no fault of yours, but one of us must remain with my mother, and Eva——"

"Yesterday she complained to me with tears in her eyes that she would be forced to go to this dance, which she detested."

"That is the very reason she ought to go," explained Els. "She is eighteen years old, and has never yet been induced to enter into any of the pleasures other girls enjoy. When she isn't in the convent she is always at home, or with Aunt

Kunigunde or one of the nuns in the woods and fields. If she wants to take the veil later, who can prevent it, but the abbess herself advises that she should have at least a glimpse of the world before leaving it. Few need it more, it seems to me, than our Eva."

"Certainly," Wolff assented. "Such a lovely creature! I know no girl more beautiful in all Nuremberg."

"Oh! you——," said his betrothed bride, shaking her finger at her lover, but he answered promptly,

"You just told me that you preferred 'good' to 'better,' and so doubtless 'fair' to 'fairer,' and you are beautiful, Els, in person and in soul. As for Eva, I admire, in pictures of madonnas and angels, those wonderful saintly eyes with their uplifted gaze and marvellously long lashes, the slight droop of the little head, and all the other charms; yet I gladly dispense with them in my heart's darling and future wife. But you, Els—if our Lord would permit me to fashion out of divine clay a life companion after my own heart, do you know how she would look?"

"Like me—exactly like Els Ortlieb, of course," replied the girl laughing.

"A correct guess, with all due modesty," Wolff answered gaily. "But take care that she does not surpass your wishes. For you know, if the little saint should meet at the dance some hand-

some fellow whom she likes better than the garb of a nun, and becomes a good Nuremberg wife, the excess of angelic virtue will vanish; and if I had a brother—in serious earnest—I would send him to your Eva."

"And," cried Els, "however quickly her mood changes, it will surely do her no harm. But as yet she cares nothing about you men. I know her, and the tears she shed when our father gave her the costly Milan suckenie,* in which she went to the ball, were anything but tears of joy."

"I only wonder," added Wolff, "that you persuaded her to go; the pious lamb knows how to use her horns fiercely enough."

"Oh, yes," Els assented, as if she knew it by experience; then she eagerly continued, "She is still just like an April day."

"And therefore," Wolff remarked, "the dance which she began with tears will end joyously enough. The young knights and nobles will gather round her like bees about honey. Count von Montfort, my brother-in-law Siebenburg says, is also at the Town Hall with his daughter."

"And the comet Cordula was followed, as usual, by a long train of admirers," said Els. "My father was obliged to give the count lodg-

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*A long garment, fitting the upper part of the body closely and widening very much below the waist, with openings for the arms.

ings; it could not be avoided. The Emperor Rudolph had named him to the Council among those who must be treated with special courtesy. So he was assigned to us, and the whole suite of apartments in the back of the house, overlooking the garden, is now filled with Montforts, Montfort household officials, menservants, squires, pages, and chaplains. Montfort horses and hounds crowd our good steeds out of their stalls. Besides the twenty stabled here, eighteen were put in the brewery in the Hundsgasse, and eight belong to Countess Cordula. Then the constant turmoil all day long and until late at night! It is fortunate that they do not lodge with us in the front of the house! It would be very bad for my mother!"

"Then you can rejoice over the departure all the more cordially," observed Wolff.

"It will hardly cause us much sorrow," Els admitted. "Yet the young countess brings much merriment into our quiet house. She is certainly a tireless madcap, and it will vex your proud sister Isabella to know that your brother-in-law Siebenburg is one of her admirers. Did she not go to the Town Hall?"

"No," Wolff answered; "the twins have changed her wonderfully. You saw the dress my mother pressed upon her for the ball—Genoese velvet and Venetian lace! Its cost would have bought a handsome house. She was inclined, too, to appear as a young mother at the festival, and

I assure you that she looked fairly regal in the magnificent attire. But this morning, after she had bathed the little boys, she changed her mind. Though my mother, and even my grandmother, urged her to go, she insisted that she belonged to the twins, and that some evil would befall the little ones if she left them."

"That is noble!" cried Els in delight, "and if I should ever——. Yet no, Isabella and I cannot be compared. My husband will never be numbered among the admirers of another woman, like your detestable brother in-law. Besides, he is wasting time with Cordula. Her worldliness repels Eva, it is true, but I have heard many pleasant things about her. Alas! she is a motherless girl, and her father is an old reveller and huntsman, who rejoices whenever she does any audacious act. But he keeps his purse open to her, and she is kind-hearted and obliging to a degree——"

"Equalled by few," interrupted Wolff, with a sneer. "The men know how to praise her for it. No paternoster would be imposed upon her in the confessional on account of cruel harshness."

"Nor for a sinful or a spiteful deed," replied Els positively. "Don't say anything against her to me, Wolff, in spite of your dissolute brother-in-law. I have enough to do to intercede for her with Eva and Aunt Kunigunde since she singed and oiled the locks of a Swiss knight belonging to the Emperor's court. Our Kätterle brought the

coals. But many other girls do that, since courtesy permits it. Her train to the Town Hall certainly made a very brave show; the fifty freight waggons you are expecting will scarcely form a longer line."

The young merchant started. The comparison roused his forgotten anxiety afresh, and after a few brief, tender words of farewell he left the object of his love. Els gazed thoughtfully after him; the moonlight revealed his tall, powerful figure for a long time. Her heart throbbed faster, and she felt more deeply than ever how warmly she loved him. He moved as though some heavy burden of care bowed his strong shoulders. She would fain have hastened after him, clung to him, and asked what troubled him, what he was concealing from her who was ready to share everything with him, but the Frauenthor, through which he entered the city, already hid him from her gaze.

She turned back into the room with a faint sigh. It could scarcely be solely anxiety about his expected goods that burdened her lover's mind. True, his weak, arrogant mother, and still more his grandmother, the daughter of a count, who lived with them in the Eysvogel house and still ruled her daughter as if she were a child, had opposed her engagement to Wolff, but their resistance had ceased since the betrothal. On the other hand, she had often heard that Frau Eysvogel, the haughty mother, dowerless herself, had many poor

and extravagant relations besides her daughter and her debt-laden, pleasure-loving husband, Sir Seitz Siebenburg, who, it could not be denied, all drew heavily upon the coffers of the ancient mercantile house. Yet it was one of the richest in Nuremberg. Yes, something of which she was still ignorant must be oppressing Wolff, and, with the firm resolve to give him no peace until he confessed everything to her, she returned to the couch of her invalid mother.

CHAPTER II.

WOLFF had scarcely vanished from the street, and Els from the window, when a man's slender figure appeared, as if it had risen from the earth, beside the spurge-laurel tree at the left of the house. Directly after some one rapped lightly on the pavement of the yard, and in a few minutes the heavy ironbound oak doors opened and a woman's hand beckoned to the late guest, who glided swiftly along in the narrow line of shadow cast by the house and vanished through the entrance.

The moon looked after him doubtfully. In former days the narrow-shouldered fellow had been seen near the Ortlieb house often enough, and his movements had awakened Luna's curiosity; for he had been engaged in amorous adventure even when work was still going on at the recently completed convent of St. Clare—an institution endowed by the Ebner brothers, to which Herr Ernst Ortlieb added a considerable sum. At that time—about three years before—the bold fellow had gone there to keep tryst evening after evening, and the pretty girl who met him was Kätterle,

the waiting maid of the beautiful Es, as Nuremberg folk called the Ortlieb sisters, Els and Eva.

Many vows of ardent, changeless love for her had risen to the moon, and the outward aspect of the man who made them afforded a certain degree of assurance that he would fulfil his pledges, for he then wore the long dark robe of reputable people, and on the front of his cap, from which a net shaped like a bag hung down his back, was a large S, and on the left shoulder of his long coat a T, the initials of the words Steadfast and True. They bore witness that the person who had them embroidered on his clothing deemed these virtues the highest and noblest. It might have been believed that the lean fellow, who scarcely looked his five-and-thirty years, possessed these lofty traits of character; for, though three full years had passed since his last meeting with Kätterle at the building site, he had gone to his sweetheart with his wonted steadfastness and truth immediately after the Emperor Rudolph's entry.

He had given her reason to rely upon him; but the moon's gaze reaches far, and had discovered the quality of Walther Biberli's "steadfastness and truth."

In one respect it proved the best and noblest; for among thousands of servitors the moon had not seen one who clung to his lord with more loyal devotion. Towards pretty young women, on the contrary, he displayed his principal virtues in a

very singular way; for the pallid nocturnal wanderer above had met him in various lands and cities, and wherever he tarried long another maid was added to the list of those to whom Biberli vowed steadfastness and truth.

True, whenever Sir Long Coat's travels led him back to any one to whom he had sworn eternal love, he went first to her, if she, too, retained the old affection. But Kätterle had cause to care for him most, for he was more warmly devoted to her than to any of the others, and in his own fashion his intentions were honest. He seriously intended, as soon as his master left the imperial court—which he hoped would not happen too soon—and returned to his ancestral castle in his native Switzerland, to establish a home of his own for his old age, and no one save Kätterle should light the hearth fire. Her outward circumstances pleased him, as well as her disposition and person. She was free-born, like himself—the son of a forest keeper—and, again like him, belonged to a Swiss family; her heritage (she was an orphan), which consisted of a house and arable land in her home, Sarnen, where she still sent her savings, satisfied his requirements. But above all she believed in him and admired his versatile mind and his experience. Moreover, she gave him absolute obedience, and loved him so loyally that she had remained unwedded, though a number of excellent men had sought her in marriage.

Kätterle had met him for the first time more than three years before when, after the battle of Marchfield, he remained several weeks in Nuremberg. They had sat side by side at a tournament, and, recognising each other as Swiss-born by the sharp sound of the letters "ch" and the pronunciation of other words, were mutually attracted.

Kätterle had a kind heart; yet at that time she almost yielded to the temptation to pray Heaven not to hasten the cure of a brave man's wounds too quickly, for she knew that Biberli was a squire in the service of the young Swiss knight Heinz Schorlin, whose name was on every lip because, in spite of his youth, he had distinguished himself at the battle of Marchfield by his rare bravery, and that the young hero would remain in Nuremberg only until his severe injuries were completely healed. His departure would bring to her separation from his servant, and sometimes when homesickness tortured her she thought she would be unable to survive the parting. Meanwhile Biberli nursed his master with faithful zeal, as if nothing bound him to Nuremberg, and even after his departure Kätterle remained in good health.

Now she had him again. Directly after the Emperor Rudolph's entrance, five days before, Biberli had come openly to the Ortlieb house and presented himself to Martsche,* the old house-

* Margaret.

keeper, as the countryman and friend of the waiting maid, who had brought her a message from home.

True, it had been impossible to say anything confidential either in the crowded kitchen or in the servants' hall. To-night's meeting was to afford the opportunity.

The menservants, carrying sedan chairs and torches, had all gone out with their master, who had taken his younger daughter, Eva, to the dance. They were to wait in front of the Town Hall, because it was doubtful whether the daughter of the house, who had been very reluctant to go to the entertainment, might not urge an early departure. Count von Montfort, whose quarters were in the Ortlieb mansion, and his whole train of male attendants, certainly would not come back till very late at night or even early morning, for the Countess Cordula remained at a ball till the close, and her father lingered over the wine cup till his daughter called him from the revellers.

All this warranted the lovers in hoping for an undisturbed interview. The place of meeting was well chosen. It was unsatisfactory only to the moon for, after Biberli had closed the heavy door of the house behind him, Luna found no chink or crevice through which a gliding ray might have watched what the true and steadfast Biberli was saying to Kätterle. There was one little window beside the door, but it was closed, and the opening

was covered with sheepskin. So the moon's curiosity was not gratified.

Instead of her silver rays, the long entry of the Ortlieb house, with its lofty ceiling, was illumined only by the light of three lanterns, which struggled dimly through horn panes. The shining dots in a dark corner of the spacious corridor were the eyes of a black cat, watching there for rats and mice.

The spot really possessed many advantages for the secret meeting of two lovers, for as it ran through the whole width of the house, it had two doors, one leading to the street, the other into the yard. In the right wall of the entry there were also two small doors, reached by a flight of steps. At this hour both closed empty rooms, for the office and the chamber where Herr Ernst Ortlieb received his business friends had not been occupied since sunset, and the bathroom and dressing-room adjoining were used only during the day.

True, some unbidden intruder might have come down the long broad staircase leading to the upper story. But in that case the lovers had the best possible hiding-place close at hand, for here large and small boxes, standing side by side and one above another, formed a protecting wall; yonder heaps of sacks and long rows of casks afforded room for concealment behind them. Rolls of goods packed in sacking leaned against the chests, inviting a fugitive to slip back of them, and surely no one would suspect the presence of a pair of

lovers in the rear of these mountains of hides and bales wrapped in matting. Still it would scarcely have been advisable to remain near them; for these packages, which the Ortlieb house brought from Venice, contained pepper and other spices that exhaled a pungent odor, endurable only by hardened nerves.

Valuable goods of various kinds lay here until they could be placed in cellars or storehouses or sold. But there was many an empty space, too, in the broad corridor for, spite of Emperor Rudolph's strictness, robbery on the highroads had by no means ceased, and Herr Ernst Ortlieb was still compelled to use caution in the transportation of costly wares.

After Biberli and his sweetheart had assured themselves that the ardour of their love had by no means cooled, they sat down on some bags filled with cloves and related to each other the experiences through which they had passed during the period of separation.

Kätterle's life had flowed on in a pleasant monotony. She had no cause to complain of her employers.

Frau Maria Ortlieb, the invalid mistress of the house, rarely needed her services.

During a ride to visit relatives in Ulm, the travellers, who were under the same escort of men at arms as a number of Nuremberg freight waggons, had been attacked by the robber knights

Absbach and Hirschhorn. An arrow had struck Frau Ortlieb's palfrey, causing the unfortunate woman a severe fall, which produced an internal injury, from which she had not yet recovered. The assault resulted unfortunately for young Hirschhorn, who led it; he met with a shameful death on the gallows.

The information enraged Biberli. Instead of feeling any sympathy for the severely injured lady, he insisted that the Nuremberg burghers had dealt with Hirschhorn in a rascally fashion; for he was a knight, and therefore, as honest judges familiar with the law, they ought to have put him to death by the sword instead of with the rope. And Kätterle agreed with him; she never contradicted his opinions, and surely Biberli must know what treatment befitted a knight, since he was the foster-brother of one.

Nor did the maid, who was in the personal service of the daughters of the house, make any complaint against them. Indeed, she could not praise Els, the elder, sufficiently. She was very just, the careful nurse of her invalid mother, and always unvarying in her cheerful kindness.

She had no fault to find with Eva either, especially as she was more religious than any one in the whole house. Spite of her marvellous beauty —Kätterle knew that there was nothing false about it—she would probably end by joining the nuns in the convent. But her mood changed with every

breath, like the weathercock on the steeple. If she got out of bed the wrong way, or one did not guess her wishes before they were uttered, she would fly into a rage at the least trifle. Then she sometimes used very unkind words; but no one could cherish anger against her long, for she had an indescribably lovely manner of trying to atone for the offences which her hasty young blood made her commit. She had gone to the ball that night as if it were a funeral; she shunned men like poison, and even kept out of the way of her sister's friends.

Biberli laughed, as if there could be no doubt of his opinion, and exclaimed: "Just wait a while! My master will meet her at the Town Hall to-night, and if the scrawny little squirrel I saw three years ago has really grown up into such a beauty, if he does not get on her track and capture her, my name isn't Biberli."

"But surely," replied Kätterle doubtfully, "you told me that you had not yet succeeded in persuading him to imitate you in steadfastness and truth."

"But he is a knight," replied the servant, striking himself pompously under the T on his shoulder, as if he, too, belonged to this favoured class, "and so he is as free to pursue a woman as to hunt the game in the forest. And my Heinz Schorlin! You saw him, and admitted that he was worth looking at. And that was when he had

scarcely recovered from his dangerous wounds, while now—— The French Knight de Preully, in Paris, with whom my dead foster-brother, until he fell sick——" Here he hesitated; an enquiring look from his sweetheart showed that—perhaps for excellent reasons—he had omitted to tell her about his sojourn in Paris.

Now that he had grown older and abandoned the wild revelry of that period in favour of truth and steadfastness, he quietly related everything she desired to know.

He had acquired various branches of learning while sharing the studies of his foster-brother, the eldest son of the old Knight Schorlin, who was then living, and therefore, when scarcely twenty, was appointed schoolmaster at Stansstadt. Perhaps he might have continued to teach—for he promised to be successful—had not a vexatious discovery disgusted him with his calling.

He was informed that the mercenaries in the Schnitzthurm guard were paid five shillings a week more than he, spite of the knowledge he had gained by so much toil.

In his indignation he went back to Schorlin Castle, which was always open to him, and he arrived just at the right time.

His present master's older brother, whose health had always been delicate, being unable to follow the profession of arms, was on the eve of departing to attend the university at Paris, accompanied

by the chaplain and an equerry. When the Lady Wendula, his master's mother, learned what an excellent reputation Biberli had gained as a schoolmaster, she persuaded her husband to send him as esquire with their sickly son.

In Paris there was at first no lack of pleasures of every description, especially as they met among the king's mercenaries many a dissolute Swiss knight and man at arms. His foster-brother, to his sorrow, was unable to resist the temptations which Satan scatters in Paris as the peasants elsewhere sow rye and oats, and the young knight was soon attacked by a severe illness. Then Biberli's gay life ended too. For months he did not leave his foster-brother's sick bed a single hour, by day or night, until death released him from his suffering.

On his return to Castle Schorlin he found many changes; the old knight had been called away from earth a few days before his son's death, and Heinz Schorlin, his present master, had fallen heir to castle and lands. This, however, was no great fortune, for the large estates of the Schorlin family were burdened by heavy debts.

The dead lord, as countryman, boon companion, and brother in arms of the Emperor Rudolph, had been always ready to place his sword at his service, and whenever a great tournament was held he never failed to be present. So the property had been consumed, and the Lady Wendula

and her son and three daughters were left in moderate circumstances. The two older girls had taken the veil, while the youngest, a merry little maiden, lived with her mother.

But the Emperor Rudolph had by no means forgotten the Lady Wendula and her dead husband, and with the utmost kindness requested her to send him her only son as soon as he was able to wield a sword and lance. He intended to repay Heinz for the love and loyalty his father had shown him through his whole life.

"And the Hapsburg," Biberli added, "had kept his word."

In a few years his young lord was ready for a position at court.

Gotthard von Ramsweg, the Lady Wendula's older brother, a valiant knight, went to his sister's home after her husband's death to manage the estate and instruct his nephew in all the exercises of knighthood. Soon the strong, agile, fearless son of a brave father, under the guidance of such a teacher, excelled many an older youth. He was barely eighteen when the Lady Wendula sent him to his imperial master. She had given him, with her blessing, fiery horses, the finest pieces of his father's suits of mail, an armour bearer, and a groom to take with him on his journey; and his uncle had agreed to accompany him to Lausanne, where the Emperor Rudolph was then holding his court to discuss with Pope Gregory—the tenth of

the name—arrangements for a new crusade. But nothing had yet been said about Biberli. On the evening before the young noble's departure, however, a travelling minstrel came to the castle, who sang of the deeds of former crusaders, and alluded very touchingly to the loneliness of the wounded knight, Herr Weisenthau, on his couch of pain. Then the Lady Wendula remembered her eldest son, and the fraternal tendance which Biberli had given him.

"And so," the servant went on, "in the anxiety of a mother's heart she urged me to accompany Heinz, her darling, as esquire, and watch over his welfare."

"Since I could use a pen, I was to write now and then what a mother desires to hear of a son. She felt great confidence in me, because she believed that I was true and steadfast. And I have kept in every respect the vow I then made to the Lady Wendula—that she should not find herself mistaken in me. I remember that evening as if it were only yesterday. To keep constantly before my eyes the praise my mistress had bestowed upon me, I ventured to ask my young master's sister to embroider the T and the S on the cap and the new coat, and the young lady did so that very night. Since that time these two initials have gone with me wherever our horses bear us, and as, after the battle of Marchfield, Biberli nursed his master back to health with care and toil, he thinks he can

prove to you, his sole sweetheart, that he wears his T and S with good reason."

In return for these words Kätterle granted her friend the fitting reward with such resignation that it was robbing the moon not to permit her to look on. Her curiosity, however, was not to remain wholly ungratified; for when Biberli found that it was time for him to repair to the Town Hall to learn whether his master, Heinz Schorlin, needed his services, Kätterle came out of the house door with him.

They found much more to say and to do ere they parted.

First, the Swiss maid-servant wished to know how the Emperor Rudolph had received Heinz Schorlin; and she had the most gratifying news.

During their stay at Lausanne, where he won the victory in a tournament, Heinz was knighted; but after the battle of Marchfield he became still dearer to the Emperor, especially when a firm friendship united the young Swiss to Hartmann, Rudolph's eighteen-year-old son, who was now on the Rhine. That very day Heinz had received a tangible proof of the imperial favour, on account of which he had gone to the dance in an extremely cheerful mood.

This good news concerning the knight, whom her young mistress had perhaps already met, awakened in the maid, who was not averse to the business of matchmaking, so dear to her sex, very

aspiring plans which aimed at nothing less than a union between Eva and Heinz Schorlin. But Biberli had scarcely perceived the purport of Kätterle's words when he anxiously interrupted her and, declaring that he had already lingered too long, cut short the suggestion by taking leave.

His master's marriage to a young girl who belonged to the city nobility, which in his eyes was far inferior in rank to a Knight Schorlin, should cast no stone in the pathway of fame that was leading him so swiftly upward. Many things must happen before Biberli could honestly advise him to give up his present free and happy life and seek rest in his own nest.

If Eva Ortlieb were as lovely as the Virgin herself, and Sir Heinz's inflammable heart should blaze as fervently as it always did, she should not lure him into the paralysing bondage of wedlock so long as he was there and watched over him.

If he must be married, Biberli had something else in view for him—something which would make him a great lord at a single stroke. But it was too soon even for that.

When he crossed the Fleischbrücke in the market place and approached the brilliantly lighted Town Hall, he had considerable difficulty in moving forward, for the whole square was thronged with curious spectators, servants in gala liveries, sedan chairs, richly caparisoned steeds, and torchbearers. The von Montfort retinue, which had

quarters in the Ortlieb house, was one of the most brilliant and numerous of all, and Biberli's eyes wandered with a look of satisfaction over the gold-mounted sedan chair of the young countess. He would rather have given his master to her than to the Nuremberg maiden whom Kätterle compared to a weathercock, and who therefore certainly did not possess the lofty virtue of steadfastness.

CHAPTER III.

Sir Heinz Schorlin's servant was on intimate terms with many of the servitors of the imperial family, and one of them conducted him to the balcony of the city pipers, which afforded a view of the great hall. The Emperor sat there at the head of the banquet table, and by his side, on a lower throne, his sister, the Burgravine von Zollern. Only the most distinguished and aristocratic personages whom the Reichstag attracted to Nuremberg, with their ladies, shared the feast given by the city in their honour.

But yonder, at a considerable distance from them, though within the space enclosed by a black and yellow silk cord, separated from the glittering throng of the other guests, he perceived—he would not trust his own eyes—the Knight Heinz Schorlin, and by his side a wonderfully charming young girl.

Biberli had not seen Eva Ortlieb for three years, yet he knew that it was no other than she. But into what a lovely creature the active, angular child with the thin little arms had developed!

The hall certainly did not lack superb women of all ages and every style of figure and bearing suited to please the eye. Many might even boast of more brilliant, aristocratic beauty, but not one could vie in witchery with her on whom Kätterle had cast an eye for his master. She had only begun a modest allusion to it, but even that was vexatious; for Biberli fancied that she had thereby "talked of the devil," and he did not wish him to appear.

With a muttered imprecation, by no means in harmony with his character, he prepared to leave the balcony; but the scene below, though it constantly filled him with fresh vexation, bound him to the spot as if by some mysterious spell.

Especially did he fancy that he had a bitter taste in his mouth when his gaze noted the marvellous symmetry of Heinz Schorlin's powerful though not unusually tall figure, his beautiful waving locks, and the aristocratic ease with which he wore his superb velvet robe—sapphire blue on the left side and white on the right, embroidered with silver falcons—or perceived how graciously the noblest of the company greeted him after the banquet; not, indeed, from envy, but because it pierced his very heart to think that this splendid young favourite of fortune, already so renowned, whom he warmly loved, should throw himself away on the daughter of a city merchant, though his motley

wares, which he had just seen, were adorned by the escutcheon of a noble house.

But Heinz Schorlin had already been attracted by many more aristocratic fair ones, only to weary of them speedily enough. This time, also, Biberli would have relied calmly on his fickleness had Kätterle's foolish wish only remained unuttered, and had Heinz treated his companion in the gay, bold fashion which usually marked his manner to other ladies. But his glance had a modest, almost devout expression when he gazed into the large blue eyes of the merchant's daughter. And now she raised them! It could not fail to bewitch the most obdurate woman hater!

Faithful, steadfast Biberli clenched his fists, and once even thought of shouting "Fire!" into the ballroom below to separate all who were enjoying themselves there wooing and being wooed.

But those beneath perceived neither him nor his wrath—least of all his master and the young girl who had come hither so reluctantly.

At home Eva had really done everything in her power to be permitted to stay away from the Town Hall. Herr Ernst Ortlieb, her father, however, had been inflexible. The chin of the little man with beardless face and hollow cheeks had even begun to tremble, and this was usually the precursor of an outburst of sudden wrath which sometimes overpowered him to such a degree that he committed acts which he afterwards regretted.

This time he had been compelled not to tolerate the opposition of his obstinate child. Emperor Rudolph himself had urged the "honourable" members of the Council to gratify him and his daughter-in-law Agnes, whom he wished to entertain pleasantly during her brief visit, by the presence of their beautiful wives and daughters at the entertainment in the Town Hall.

Herr Ortlieb's invalid wife could not spare Els, her older daughter and faithful nurse, so he required Eva's obedience, and compelled her to give up her opposition to attending the festival; but she dreaded the vain, worldly gaiety—nay, actually felt a horror of it.

Even while still a pupil at the convent school she had often asked herself whether it would not be the fairest fate for her, like her Aunt Kunigunde, the abbess of the convent of St. Clare, to vow herself to the Saviour and give up perishable joys to secure the rapture of heaven, which lasted throughout eternity, and might begin even here on earth, in a quiet life with God, a complete realisation of the Saviour's loving nature, and the great sufferings which he took upon himself for love's sake. Oh, even suffering and bleeding with the Most High were rich in mysterious delight! Aye, no earthly happiness could compare with the blissful feeling left by those hours of pious ecstasy.

Often she had sat with closed eyes for a long time, dreaming that she was in the kingdom of

heaven and, herself an angel, dwelt with angels. How often she had wondered whether earthly love could bestow greater joy than such a happy dream, or the walks through the garden and forest, during which the abbess told her of St. Francis of Assisi, who founded her order, the best and most warm-hearted among the successors of Christ, of whom the Pope himself said that he would hear even those whom God would not! Moreover, there was no plant, no flower, no cry of any animal in the woods which was not familiar to the Abbess Kunigunde. Like St. Francis, she distinguished in everything which the ear heard and the eye beheld voices that bore witness to the goodness and greatness of the Most High. The abbess felt bound by ties of sisterly affection to every one of God's creatures, and taught Eva to love them, too, and, as a person who treats a child kindly wins the mother's heart also, to obtain by love of his creatures that of the Creator.

Others had blamed her because she held aloof from her sister's friends and amusements. They were ignorant of the joys of solitude, which her aunt and her saint had taught her to know.

She had endured interruptions and reproaches, often humbly, oftener still, when her hot blood swept away her self-control, with vehement indignation and tears; but meanwhile she had always cherished the secret thought that the time would come when she, too, would be permitted, at one

with God and the Saviour, to enjoy the raptures of eternal bliss. She loved her invalid mother and, often as his sudden fits of passion alarmed her, she was tenderly attached to her father; yet it would have seemed to her an exquisite delight to be permitted to imitate the saints and sever all bonds which united her to the world and its clogging demands. She had long been yearning for the day when she would be allowed to entreat the abbess to grant her admittance to the convent, whose doors would be flung wide open for her because, next to the brothers Ebner, who founded it, her parents had contributed the largest sum for its support.

But she was obliged to wait patiently, for Els, her older sister, would probably soon marry her Wolff, and then it would be her turn to nurse her invalid mother. Her own heart dictated this, and the abbess had said: "Let her enter eternity clasping your hand before you begin, with us, to devote all your strength to securing your own salvation. Besides, you will thereby ascend a long row of steps nearer to your sublime goal."

But Eva would far rather have given her hand now, aloof from the world, to the Most High in an inviolable bond. What marvel that, with such a goal in view, she was deeply reluctant to enter the gay whirl of a noisy ball!

With serious repugnance she had allowed Kätterle and her sister to adorn her, and entered the

sedan chair which was to convey her to the Town Hall. Doubtless her own image, reflected in the mirror, had seemed charming enough, and the loud expressions of delight from the servants and others who admired her rich costume had pleased her; but directly after she realized the vanity of this emotion and, while approaching the ballroom in her chair, she prayed to her saint to help her conquer it.

Striving honestly to vanquish this error, she entered the hall soon after the Emperor and his young daughter-in-law; but there she was greeted from the balcony occupied by the city pipers and musicians, long before Biberli entered it, with the same fanfare that welcomed the illustrious guests of the city, and with which blended the blare of the heralds' trumpets. Thousands of candles in the chandeliers and candelabra diffused a radiance as brilliant as that of day and, confused by the noise and waves of light which surged around her, she had drawn closer to her father, clinging to him for protection. She especially missed her sister, with whom she had grown up, who had become her second self, and whom she needed most when she emerged from her quiet life of introspection into the gay world.

At first she had stood with downcast lashes, but soon her eyes wandered over the waving plumes and flashing jewels, the splendour of silk and velvet, the glitter of gold and glimmer of pearls.

Sometimes the display in church had been scarcely less brilliant, and even without her sister's request she had gazed at it, but how entirely different it was! There she had rejoiced in her own modest garb, and told herself that her simplicity was more pleasing to God and the saints than the vain splendour of the others, which she might so easily have imitated or even surpassed. But here the anxious question of how she appeared among the rest of the company forced itself upon her.

True, she knew that the brocade suckenie, which her father had ordered from Milan, was costly; that the sea-green hue of the right side harmonised admirably with the white on the left; that the tendrils and lilies of the valley wrought in silver, which seemed to be scattered over the whole, looked light and airy; yet she could not shake off the feeling that everything she wore was in disorder—here something was pulled awry, there something was crushed. Els, who had attended to her whole toilet, was not there to arrange it, and she felt thoroughly uncomfortable in the midst of this worldly magnificence and bustle.

Notwithstanding her father's presence, she had never been so desolate as among these ladies and gentlemen, nearly all of whom were strangers.

Her sister was intimate with the other girls of her age and station, few of whom were absent, and if Eva could have conjured her to her side doubtless many would have joined them; but she knew

no one well, and though many greeted her, no one lingered. Everybody had friends with whom they were on far more familiar terms. The young Countess von Montfort, a girl of her own age and an inmate of her own home, also gave her only a passing word. But this was agreeable to her—she disliked Cordula's free manners.

Many who were friends of Els had gathered around Ursula Vorchtel, the daughter of the richest man in the city, and she intentionally avoided the Ortliebs because, before Wolff Eysvogel sued for Els's hand, he and Ursula had been intended for each other.

Eva was just secretly vowing that this first ball should also be the last, when the imperial magistrate, Herr Berthold Pfinzing, her godfather, came to present her to the Emperor, who had requested to see the little daughter of the Herr Ernst Ortlieb whose son had fallen in battle for him. His "little saint," Herr Pfinzing added, looked no less lovely amid the gay music of the Nuremberg pipers than kneeling in prayer amid the notes of the organ.

Every tinge of colour had faded from Eva's cheeks, and though a few hours before she had asked her sister what the Emperor's greatness signified in the presence of God that she should be forced, for his sake, to be faithless to the holiest things, now fear of the majesty of the powerful sovereign made her breath come quicker.

How, clinging to her godfather's hand, she reached the Emperor Rudolph's throne she could never describe, for what happened afterwards resembled a confused dream of mingled bliss and pain, from which she was first awakened by her father's warning that the time of departure had come.

When she raised her downcast eyes the monarch was standing before the throne placed for him. She had been compelled to bend her head backward in order to see his face, for his figure, seven feet in height, towered like a statue of Roland above all who surrounded him. But when, after the Austrian duchess, his daughter-in-law, who was scarcely beyond childhood, and the Burgrave von Zollern, his sister, had graciously greeted her, and Eva with modest thanks had also bowed low before the Emperor Rudolph, a smile, spite of her timidity, flitted over her lips, for as she bent the knee her head barely reached above his belt. The Burgravine, a vivacious matron, must have noticed it, for she beckoned to her, and with a few kind words mentioned the name of the young knight who stood behind her, between her own seat and that of the young Duchess Agnes of Austria, and recommended him as an excellent dancer. Heinz Schorlin, the master of the true and steadfast Biberli, had bowed courteously, and answered respectfully that he hoped he should not prove himself unworthy of praise from such lips.

Meanwhile his glance met Eva's, and the Burgravine probably perceived with what ardent admiration the knight's gaze rested on the young Nuremberg beauty, for she had scarcely stepped back after the farewell greeting when the noble lady said in a low tone, but loud enough for Eva's quick ear to catch the words, "Methinks yonder maiden will do well to guard her little heart this evening against you, you unruly fellow! What a sweet, angelic face!"

Eva's cheeks crimsoned with mingled shame and pleasure at such words from such lips, and she would have been only too glad to hear what the knight whispered to the noble lady.

The attention of the young Duchess Agnes, daughter of King Ottocar of Bohemia and wife of the Emperor's third son, who also bore the name of Rudolph, had been claimed during this incident by the Duke of Nassau, who had presented his ladies to her, but they had scarcely retired when she beckoned to Heinz Schorlin, and while talking with him gazed into his eyes with such warm, childlike pleasure that Eva was incensed; she thought it unseemly for a wife and a duchess to be on such familiar terms with a simple knight. Nay, her disapproval of the princess's conduct must have been very deep, for during the whole time of her conversation with the knight there was a loud singing in the young girl's ears. The Bohemian's face might be considered pretty;

her dark eyes sparkled brightly, animating the immature features, now slightly sunburnt; and although four years younger than Eva, her figure, though not above middle height, was well developed and, in spite of its flexibility, aristocratic in bearing. While conversing with Heinz Schorlin she seemed joyously excited, unrestrainedly cordial, but her manner expressed disappointment and royal hauteur as another group of ladies and gentlemen came forward to be presented, compelling her to turn her back upon the young Swiss with a regretful shrug of her shoulders.

The counts and countesses, knights and ladies who thronged around her concealed her from Eva's eyes, who, now that Heinz Schorlin had left the Bohemian, again turned her attention to the Emperor, and even ventured to approach him. What paternal gentleness Rudolph's deep tones expressed! How much his face attracted her!

True, it could make no pretensions to beauty —the thin, hooked nose was far too large and long; the corners of the mouth drooped downward too much; perhaps it was this latter peculiarity which gave the whole face so sorrowful an aspect. Eva thought she knew its source. The wound dealt a few months before by the death of his faithful wife, the love of his youth, still ached. His eyes could not be called either large or bright; but how kindly, how earnest, shrewd and, when an amusing thought passed through his

mind, how mischievous they could look! His light-brown hair had not yet turned very grey, spite of his sixty-three years, but the locks had lost their luxuriance and fell straight, except for a slight curl at the lower ends, below his neck.

Eva's father, when a young man, had met Frederic II, of the Hohenstaufen line, in Italy, and was wont to call this a special boon of fate. True, her aunt, the abbess, said she did not envy him the honour of meeting the Antichrist; yet that very day after mass she had counselled Eva to impress the Emperor Rudolph's appearance on her memory. To meet noble great men elevates our hearts and makes us better, because in their presence we become conscious of our own insignificance and the duty of emulating them. She would willingly have given more than a year of her life to be permitted to gaze into the pure, loving countenance of St. Francis, who had closed his eyes seven years after her birth.

So Eva, who was accustomed to render strict obedience to her honoured aunt, honestly strove to watch every movement of the Emperor; but her attention had been continually diverted, mainly by the young knight, from whom—the Emperor's sister, Burgravine Elizabeth, had said so herself—danger threatened her heart.

But the young Countess Cordula von Montfort, the inmate of her home, also compelled her to gaze after her, for Heinz Schorlin had approached

the vivacious native of the Vorarlberg, and the freedom with which she treated him—allowing herself to go so far as to tap him on the arm with her fan—vexed and offended her like an insult offered to her whole sex. To think that a girl of high station should venture upon such conduct before the eyes of the Emperor and his sister!

Not for the world would she have permitted any man to talk and laugh with her in such a way. But the young knight whom she saw do this was again the Swiss. Yet his bright eyes had just rested upon her with such devout admiration that lack of respect for a lady was certainly not in his nature, and he merely found himself compelled, contrary to his wish, to defend himself against the countess and her audacity.

Eva had already heard much praise of the great valour of the young knight Heinz Schorlin. When Kätterle, whose friend and countryman was in his service, spoke of him—and that happened by no means rarely—she had always called him a devout knight, and that he was so, in truth, he showed her plainly enough; for there was fervent devotion in the eyes which now again sought hers like an humble penitent.

The musicians had just struck up the Polish dance, and probably the knight, whom the Emperor's sister had recommended to her for a partner, wished by this glance to apologise for inviting Countess Cordula von Montfort instead. There-

fore she did not need to avoid the look, and might obey the impulse of her heart to give him a warning in the language of the eyes which, though mute, is yet so easily understood. Hitherto she had been unable to answer him, even by a word, yet she believed that she was destined to become better acquainted, if only to show him that his power, of which the Burgravine had spoken, was baffled when directed against the heart of a pious maiden.

And something must also attract him to her, for while she had the honour of being escorted up and down the hall by one of the handsome sons of the Burgrave von Zollern to the music of the march performed by the city pipers, Heinz Schorlin, it is true, did the same with his lady, but he looked away from her and at Eva whenever she passed him.

Her partner was talkative enough, and his description of the German order which he expected to enter, as his two brothers had already done, would have seemed to her well worthy of attention at any other time, but now she listened with but partial interest.

When the dance was over and Sir Heinz approached, her heart beat so loudly that she fancied her neighbours must hear it; but ere he had spoken a single word old Burgrave Frederick himself greeted her, inquired about her invalid mother, her blithe sister, and her aunt, the

abbess, who in her youth had been the queen of every dance, and asked if she found his son a satisfactory partner.

It was an unusual distinction to be engaged in conversation by this distinguished gentleman, yet Eva would fain have sent him far away, and her replies must have sounded monosyllabic enough; but the sweet shyness that overpowered her so well suited the modest young girl, who had scarcely passed beyond childhood, that he did not leave her until the *Rai* began, and then quitted her with the entreaty that she would remove the cap which had hitherto rendered her invisible, to the injury of knights and gentlemen, and be present at the dance which he should soon give at the castle.

The pleasant old nobleman had scarcely left her when she turned towards the young man who had just approached with the evident intention of leading her to the dance, but he was again standing beside Cordula von Montfort, and a feeling of keen resentment overpowered her.

The young countess was challenging his attention still more boldly, tossing her head back so impetuously that the turban-like roll on her hair, spite of the broad ribbon that fastened it under her chin, almost fell on the floor. But her advances not only produced no effect, but seemed to annoy the knight. What charm could he find in a girl who, in a costume which displayed the great-

est extreme of fashion, resembled a Turk rather than a Christian woman? True, she had an aristocratic bearing, and perhaps Els was right in saying that her strongly marked features revealed a certain degree of kindliness, but she wholly lacked the spell of feminine modesty. Her pleasant grey eyes and full red lips seemed created only for laughter, and the plump outlines of her figure were better suited to a matron than a maiden in her early girlhood. Not the slightest defect escaped Eva during this inspection. Meanwhile she remembered her own image in the mirror, and a smile of satisfaction hovered round her red lips.

Now the knight bowed.

Was he inviting the countess to dance again? No, he turned his back to her and approached Eva, whose lovely, childlike face brightened as if a sunbeam had shone upon it. The possibility of refusing her hand for the *Rai* never entered her head, but he told her voluntarily that he had invited Countess Cordula for the Polish dance solely in consequence of the Burgravine's command, but now that he was permitted to linger at her side he meant to make up for lost time.

He kept his word, and was by no means content with the *Rai;* for, after the young Duchess Agnes had summoned him to a *Zäuner*, and during its continuance again talked with him far more confidentially than the modest Nuremberg maiden could approve, he persuaded Eva to try the

Schwäbeln with him also; and though she had always disliked such dances she yielded, and her natural grace, as well as her quick ear for time, helped her to catch the unfamiliar steps without difficulty. While doing so he whispered that even the angels in heaven could have no greater bliss than it afforded him to float thus through the hall, clasping her in his arm, while she glanced up at him with a happy look and bent her little head in assent. She would gladly have exclaimed warmly: "Yes, indeed! Yet the Burgravine says that danger threatens me from you, you dear, kind fellow, and I should do well to avoid you."

Besides, she felt indebted to him. What would have befallen her here in his absence! Moreover, it gave her a strange sense of pleasure to gaze into his eyes, allow herself to be borne through the wide hall by his strong arm, and while pressed closely to his side imagine that his swiftly throbbing heart felt the pulsing of her own. Instead of injuring her, wishing her evil, and asking her to do anything wrong, he certainly had only good intentions. He had cared for her as if he occupied the place of her own brother who fell in the battle of Marchfield. It would have given him most pleasure—he had said so himself—to dance everything with her, but decorum and the royal dames who kept him in attendance would not permit it. However, he came to her in every pause to exchange at least a few brief words and a glance. During the longest one,

which lasted more than an hour and was devoted to the refreshment of the guests, he led her into a side room which had been transformed into a blossoming garden.

Seats were placed behind the green birch trees —amid whose boughs hung gay lamps—and the rose bushes which surrounded a fountain of perfumed water, and Eva had already followed the Swiss knight across the threshold when she saw among the branches at the end of the room the Countess Cordula, at whose feet several young nobles knelt or reclined, among them Seitz Siebenburg, the brother-in-law of Wolff Eysvogel, her sister's betrothed bridegroom.

The manner of the husband and father whose wife, only six weeks before, had become the mother of twin babies—beautiful boys—and who for Cordula's sake so shamefully forgot his duties, crimsoned her cheeks with a flush of anger, while the half-disapproving, half-troubled look that Sir Boemund Altrosen cast, sometimes at the countess, sometimes at Siebenburg, showed her that she herself was on the eve of doing something which the best persons could not approve; for Altrosen, who leaned silently against the wall beside the countess, ever and anon pushing back the coal-black hair from his pale face, had been mentioned by her godfather as the noblest of the younger knights gathered in Nuremberg. A voice in her own heart, too, cried out that this was no fitting place for her.

If Els had been with her, Eva said to herself, she certainly would not have permitted her to enter this room, where such careless mirth prevailed, alone with a knight, and the thought roused her for a short time from the joyous intoxication in which she had hitherto revelled, and awakened a suspicion that there might be peril in trusting herself to Heinz Schorlin without reserve.

"Not here," she entreated, and he instantly obeyed her wish, though the Countess Cordula, as if he were alone, instead of with a lady, loudly and gaily bade him stay where pleasure had built a hut under roses.

Eva was pleased that her new friend did not even vouchsafe the young countess an answer. His obedience led her also to believe that her anxiety had been in vain. Yet she imposed greater reserve of manner upon herself so rigidly that Heinz noticed it, and asked what cloud had dimmed the pure radiance of her gracious sunshine.

Eva lowered her eyes and answered gently: "You ought not to have taken me where the diffidence due to modesty is forgotten." Heinz Schorlin understood her and rejoiced to hear the answer. In his eyes, also, Countess Cordula this evening had exceeded the limits even of the liberty which by common consent she was permitted above others. He believed that he had found in Eva the embodiment of pure and beautiful womanhood.

He had given her his heart from the first moment that their eyes met. To find her in every respect exactly what he had imagined, ere he heard a single word from her lips, enhanced the pleasure he felt to the deepest happiness which he had ever experienced.

He had already been fired with a fleeting fancy for many a maiden, but not one had appeared to him, even in a remote degree, so lovable as this graceful young creature who trusted him with such childlike confidence, and whose innocent security by the side of the dreaded heart-breaker touched him.

Never before had it entered his mind concerning any girl to ask himself the question how she would please his mother at home. The thought that she whom he so deeply honoured might possess a magic mirror which showed her her reckless son as he dallied with the complaisant beauties whose graciousness, next to dice-playing, most inflamed his blood, had sometimes disturbed his peace of mind when Biberli suggested it. But when Eva looked joyously up at him with the credulous confidence of a trusting child, he could imagine no greater bliss than to hear his mother, clasping the lovely creature in her arms, call her her dear little daughter.

His reckless nature was subdued, and an emotion of tenderness which he had never experienced before thrilled him as she whispered, "Take me to

a place where everybody can see us, but where we need not notice anyone else."

How significant was that little word "we"! It showed that already she united herself and him in her thoughts. To her pure nature nothing could be acceptable which must be concealed from the light of the sun and the eyes of man. And her wish could be fulfilled.

The place where Biberli had discovered them, and where refreshments had just been served to the Emperor and the ladies and gentlemen nearest to his person, who had been joined by several princes of the Church, was shut off by the bannerets, thus preventing the entrance of any uninvited person; but Heinz Schorlin belonged to the sovereign's suite and had admittance everywhere.

So he led Eva behind the black and yellow rope to two vacant chairs at the end of the enclosed space where the banquet had been swiftly arranged for the Emperor and the other illustrious guests of Nuremberg.

These seats were in view of the whole company, yet it would have been as difficult to interrupt him and his lady as any of the table companions of the imperial pair. Eva followed the knight without anxiety, and took her place beside him in the well-chosen seat.

A young cup-bearer of noble birth, with whom Heinz was well acquainted, brought unasked to him and his companion sparkling Malvoisie in

Venetian glasses, and Heinz began the conversation by inviting Eva to drink to the many days brightened by her favour which, if the saints heard his prayer, should follow this, the most delightful evening of his life. He omitted to ask her to pour the wine for him, knowing that many of the guests in the ballroom were watching them; besides the saucy little count came again and again to fill his goblet, and he wished to avoid everything which might elicit sarcastic comment. The young cup-bearer desisted as soon as he noticed the respectful reserve with which Heinz treated his lady, and the youth was soon obliged to leave the hall with his liege lord, Duke Rudolph of Austria, who was to set out for Carinthia early the following morning, and withdrew with his wife without sharing the banquet. The latter accompanied her husband to the castle, but she was to remain in Nuremberg during the session of the Reichstag with the lonely widowed Emperor, who was especially fond of the young Bohemian princess. Before and during the dance with Heinz the latter had requested him to use the noble Arabian steed, a gift from the Sultan Kalaun to the Emperor, who had bestowed it upon her, and also expressed the hope of meeting the knight frequently.

In the conversation which Heinz began with Eva he was at first obliged to defend himself, for she had admitted that she had heard the Burgravine's warning to beware of him.

At the same time she had found opportunity to tell him that her heart yearned for something different from worldly love, and that she felt safe from every one because St. Clare was constantly watching over her.

He replied that he had been reared in piety, that he knew the close relations existing between her patron saint and the holy Francis of Assisi, and that he, too, had experienced many things from this man of God. Eva, with warm interest, asked when and where, and he willingly told her.

On the way from Augsburg to Nuremberg, while riding in advance of the imperial court, he had met an old barefooted man who, exhausted by the heat of the day, had sunk down by the side of the road as if lifeless, with his head resting against the trunk of a tree. Moved with compassion, he dismounted, to try to do something for the greybeard. A few sips of wine had restored him to consciousness, but his weary, wounded feet would carry him no farther. Yet it would have grieved the old man sorely to be forced to interrupt his journey, for the Chapter General in Portiuncula, in Italy, had sent him with an important message to the brothers of his order in Germany, and especially in Nuremberg.

The old Minorite monk was especially dignified in aspect, and when he chanced to mention that he had known St. Francis well and was one of those who had nursed him during his last illness, a dis-

pute had arisen between Heinz Schorlin, the armor bearer, and his servant Walther Biberli, for each desired to give up his saddle to the old man and pursue his journey on foot for his sake and the praise of God.

But the Minorite could not be persuaded to break his vow never again to mount a knight's charger and, even had it not been evident from his words, Heinz asserted that the aristocratic dignity of his bearing would have shown that he belonged to a noble race.

Biberli's eloquence gained the victory in this case also, and though the groom led by the bridle another young stallion which the ex-schoolmaster might have mounted, he had walked cheerily beside the old monk, sweeping up the dust with his long robe. At the tavern the knight and his attendants had been abundantly repaid for their kindness to the Minorite, for his conversation was both entertaining and edifying; and Heinz repeated to his lady, who listened attentively, much that the monk had related about St. Francis.

Eva, too, was also on the ground dearest and most familiar to her. Her little tongue ran fast enough, and her large blue eyes sparkled with an unusually bright and happy lustre as she completed and corrected what the young knight told her about the saint.

How much that was lovable, benevolent, and wonderful there was to relate concerning this

prophet of peace and good-will, this apostle of poverty and toil who, in every movement of nature, perceived and felt a summons to recognise the omnipotence and goodness of God, an invitation to devout submission to the Most High!

How many amusing, yet edifying and touching anecdotes, the Abbess Kunigunde had narrated of him and the most beloved of his followers! Much of this conversation Eva repeated to the knight, and her pleasure in the subject of the conversation increased the vivacity of her active mind, and soon led her to talk with eager eloquence. Heinz Schorlin fairly hung on her lips, and his eyes, which betrayed how deeply all that he was hearing moved him, rested on hers until a flourish of trumpets announced that the interval between the dances was over.

He had listened in delight and, he felt, was forever bound to her. When duty summoned him to attend the Emperor he asked himself whether such a conversation had ever been held in the midst of a merry dance; whether God, in his goodness, had ever created a being so perfect in soul and body as this fair saint, who could transform a ballroom into a church.

Aye, Eva had done so; for, ardent as was the knight's love, something akin to religious devotion blended with his yearning desire. The last words which he addressed to her before leading her back

to the others contained the promise to make her patron saint, St. Clare, his own.

The Princess of Nassau had invited him for the next dance, but she found Heinz Schorlin, whom the young Duchess Agnes had just said was merry enough to bring the dead to life, a very quiet partner; while young Herr Schürstab, who danced with Eva and, like all the members of the Honourable Council, knew that she desired to take the veil, afterwards told his friends that the younger beautiful E would suit a Carthusian convent, where speech is prohibited, much better than a ballroom.

But after this "*Zäuner*" Heinz Schorlin again loosed her tongue. When he had told her how he came to the court, and she had learned that he had joined the Emperor Rudolph at Lausanne just as he took the vow to take part in the crusade, there was no end to her questions concerning the reason that the German army had not already marched against the infidels, and whether he himself did not long to make them feel his sword.

Then she asked still further particulars concerning Brother Benedictus, the old Minorite whom he had treated so kindly. Heinz told her what he knew, and when he at last enquired whether she still regretted having met him whom she feared, she gazed frankly into his eyes and, smiling faintly, shook her head.

This increased his ardour, and he warmly entreated her to tell him where he could meet her

again, and permit him to call her his lady. But she hesitated to reply, and ere he could win from her even the faintest shadow of consent, Ernst Ortlieb, who had been talking with other members of the council in the room where the wine was served, interrupted him to take his daughter home.

She went reluctantly. The clasp of the knight's hand was felt all the way to the house, and it would have been impossible and certainly ungracious not to return it.

Heinz Schorlin had obtained no assent, yet the last glance from her eyes had been more eloquent than many a verbal promise, and he gazed after her enraptured.

It seemed like desecration to give the hand in which hers had rested to lead any one else to the dance, and when the rotund Duke of Pomerania invited him to a drinking bout at his quarters at the Green Shield he accepted; for without Eva the hall seemed deserted, the light robbed of its brilliancy, and the gay music transformed to a melancholy dirge.

But when at the Green Shield the ducal wine sparkled in the beakers, the gold shone and glistened on the tables, and the rattle of the dice invited the bystanders to the game, he thought that whatever he undertook on such a day of good fortune must have a lucky end.

The Emperor had filled his purse again, but the friendly gift did not cover his debts, and he wanted

to be rid of them before he told his mother that he had found a dear, devout daughter for her, and intended to return home to settle in the ancestral castle, his heritage, and share with his uncle the maintenance of his rights and the management of fields and forests.

Besides, he must test for the first time the power of his new patroness, St. Clare, instead of his old one, St. Leodegar. But the former served him ill enough—she denied him her aid, at any rate in gambling. The full purse was drained to its last *zecchin* only too soon, and Heinz, laughing, turned it inside out before the eyes of his comrades. But though the kind-hearted Duke of Pomerania, with whom Heinz was a special favourite, pushed a little heap of gold towards him with his fat hands, that the Swiss might try his luck again with borrowed money, which brings good fortune, he remained steadfast for Eva's sake.

On his way to the Green Shield he had confessed to Biberli—who, torch in hand, led the way—that he intended very shortly to turn his back on the court and ride home, because this time he had found the right chatelaine for his castle.

"That means the last one," the ex-schoolmaster answered quietly, carefully avoiding fanning the flame of his young master's desire by contradiction. Only he could not refrain from entreating him not to burn his fingers with the dice, and, to confirm it, added that luck in gambling was apt

to be scanty where fortune was so lavish in the gifts of love.

Heinz now remembered this warning. It had been predicted to his darling that meeting him would bring her misfortune, but he was animated by the sincere determination to force the jewel of his heart to remember Heinz Schorlin with anything but sorrow and regret.

What would have seemed impossible to him a few hours before, he now realised. With a steady hand he pushed back the gold to the duke, who pressed it upon him with friendly glances from his kind little eyes and an urgent whispered entreaty, and took his leave, saying that to-night the dice and he were at odds.

With these words he left the room, though the host tried to detain him almost by force, and the guests also earnestly endeavoured to keep the pleasant, jovial fellow. The loss, over which Biberli shook his head angrily, did not trouble him. Even on his couch Heinz found but a short time to think of his empty purse and the lovely maid who was to make the old castle among his beloved Swiss mountains an earthly paradise, for sleep soon closed his eyes.

The next morning the events of the evening seemed like a dream. Would that they had been one! Only he would not have missed, at any cost, the sweet memories associated with Eva. But could she really become his own? He feared not;

for the higher the sun rose the more impracticable his intentions of the night before appeared. At last he even thought of the religious conversation in the dancing hall with a superior smile, as if it had been carried on by some one else. The resolve to ask from her father the hand of the girl he loved he now rejected. No, he was not yet fit for a husband and the quiet life in the old castle. Yet Eva should be the lady of his heart, her patron saint should be his, and he would never sue for the love of any other maiden. Hers he must secure. To press even one kiss on her scarlet lips seemed to him worth the risk of life. When he had stilled this fervent longing he could ride with her colour on helm and shield from tourney to tourney, and break a lance for her in every land through which he passed with the Emperor. What would happen afterwards let the saints decide. As usual, Biberli was his confidant, and declared himself ready to use Kätterle's services in his master's behalf.

He had his own designs in doing this. He could rely upon the waiting maid's assistance, and if there were secret meetings between Eva Ortlieb and his lord, which would appease the knight's ardour, even in a small degree, the task of disgusting Heinz with his luckless idea of an early marriage would not prove too difficult.

CHAPTER IV.

Eva Ortlieb had been borne home from the ball in her sedan chair with a happy smile hovering round her fresh young lips.

It still lingered there when she found her sister in their chamber, sitting at the spinning wheel. She had not left her suffering mother until her eyes closed in slumber, and was now waiting for Eva, to hear whether the entertainment had proved less disagreeable than she feared, and—as she had sent her maid to bed—to help her undress.

One glance at Eva told her that she had perhaps left the ballroom even more reluctantly than she entered it; but when Els questioned her so affectionately, and with maternal care began to unfasten the ribbon which tied her cap, the young girl, who in the sedan chair had determined to confess to no one on earth what so deeply moved her heart, could not resist the impulse to clasp her in her arms and kiss her with impetuous warmth.

Els received the caress with surprise for, though both girls loved each other tenderly, they,

like most sisters, rarely expressed it by tangible proofs of tenderness. Not until Eva released her did Els exclaim in merry amazement: "So it was delightful, my darling?"

"Oh, *so* delightful!" Eva protested with hands uplifted, and at the same time met her sister's eyes with a radiant glance.

Yet the thought entered her mind that it ill beseemed her to express so much pleasure in a worldly amusement. Her glance fell in shame, and she gently continued in that tone of self-compassion which was by no means unfamiliar to the members of her family. "True, though the Emperor is so noble, and both he and the Burgravine were so gracious to me, at first—and not only for a brief quarter of an hour, but a very long time—I could feel no real pleasure. What am I saying? Pleasure! I was indescribably desolate and alone among all those vain, bedizened strangers. I was like a shipwrecked sailor washed ashore by the waves and surrounded by people whose language is unfamiliar."

"But half Nuremberg was at the ball," her sister interrupted. "Now you see the trouble, darling. Whoever, like you, remains in seclusion and mounts a tall tree to be entirely alone, will be deserted; for who would be kind-hearted enough to learn to climb for your sake? But it seems that afterwards one and another——"

"Oh!" Eva interrupted, "if you think that

any of your friends gave me more than a passing greeting, you are mistaken. Not even Barbel, Ann, or Metz took any special notice of your sister. They kept near Ursel Vorchtel, and she and her brother Ulrich, of course, behaved as if I wore a fern cap and had become invisible. I cannot tell you how uncomfortable I felt, and then—yes, Els, then I first realised distinctly what you are to me. Obstinate as I often am, in spite of all your kindness and care, ungraciously as I often treat you, to-night I clearly perceived that we belong together, like a pair of eyes, and that without you I am only half myself—or, at any rate—not complete. And—as we are speaking in images—I felt like a sapling whose prop has been removed; even your Wolff can never have longed for you more ardently. My father found little time to give me. As soon as he saw me take my place in the Polish dance he went with Uncle Pfinzing to the drinking room, and I did not see him again till he came to bring me home. He had asked Frau Nützel to look after me, but her Kathrin was taken ill, as I heard when we were leaving, and she disappeared with her during the first dance. So I moved forlornly here and there until he—Heinz Schorlin—came and took charge of me."

"He? Sir Heinz Schorlin?" asked Els in surprise, a look of anxious suspense clouding her pretty, frank face. "The reckless Swiss, whom Countess Cordula said yesterday was the pike in

the dull carp pond of the court, and the only person for whom it was worth while to bear the penance imposed in the confessional?"

"Cordula von Montfort!" cried Eva scornfully. "If she speaks to me I shall not answer her, I can tell you. My cheeks crimson when I think of the liberty——"

"Never mind her," said her sister soothingly. "She is a motherless child, and therefore unlike us. As for Heinz Schorlin, he is certainly a gallant knight; but, my innocent lambkin, he is a wolf nevertheless."

"A wolf?" asked Eva, opening her large eyes as wide as if they beheld some terrible object. But she soon laughed softly, and added quietly: "But a very harmless wolf, who humbly changes his nature when the right hand strokes him. How you stare at me! I am not thinking of your beloved Wolff, whom you have tamed tolerably well, but the wolf of Gubbio, which did so much mischief, and to which St. Francis went forth, accosted him as Brother Wolf, and reminded him that they both owed their lives to the goodness of the same divine Father. The animal seemed to understand this, for it nodded to him. The saint now made a bargain with the wolf, which gave him its paw in pledge of the oath; and it kept the promise, for it followed St. Francis into the city, and never again harmed anyone. The citizens of Gubbio fed the good beast, and when it died sincerely mourned

it. If you wish to know from whom I heard this edifying story—which is true, and can be confirmed by some one now in Nuremberg who witnessed it—let me tell you that it was the wicked wolf himself; not the Gubbio one, but he from Switzerland. An old Minorite monk, to whom he compassionately gave his horse, is the witness I mentioned. At the tavern the priest told him what he had beheld with his own eyes. Do you still inveigh against the dangerous beast, which acts like the good Samaritan, and finds nothing more delightful than hearing or speaking of our dear saint?"

"And this in the Town Hall during the dance?" asked Els, clasping her hands as if she had heard something unprecedented.

Eva, fairly radiant with joy, nodded assent; and Els heard the ring of pleasure in her clear voice, too, as she exclaimed: "That was just what made the ball so delightful. The dancing! Oh, yes, it is easy enough to walk and turn in time to the music when one has such a knight for a partner; but that was by no means the pleasantest part of it. During the interval—it seemed but an instant, yet it really lasted a considerable time—we first entered into conversation."

"In one of the side rooms?" asked Els, the bright colour fading from her cheeks.

"What are you thinking of?" replied Eva in a tone of offence. "I believe I know what is seemly as well as anybody else. True, your Countess

Cordula did not set the most praiseworthy example. She allowed the whole throng of knights to surround her in the ante-room, and your future brother-in-law, Siebenburg, outdid them all. We—Heinz Schorlin and I—sat near the Emperor's table in the great hall, where everybody could see us. There the conversation naturally passed from the old Minorite to the holy founder of his order, and remained there. And if ever valiant knight possessed a devout mind, it is Heinz Schorlin. 'Whoever goes into battle without relying upon God and his saints,' he said, 'will find his courage lack wings, and his armour the surest defensive weapon.'"

"In the ballroom!" again fell from her sister's lips in the same tone of amazement.

"Where else?" asked Eva angrily. "I never met him except there. What do you other girls talk about at such entertainments, if it surprises you? Besides, St. Francis was by no means our only subject; we spoke of the future crusade, too. And oh!—you may believe me—we would have been glad to talk of such things for hours. He knew many things about our saint; but the precise one which makes him especially great and lovable, and withal so powerful that he attracted all whom he deemed worthy to follow him, he had not understood, and I was permitted to be the first person to bring it clearly before his mind. Ah! and his wit is as keen as his sword, and his heart is

as open to all that is noble and sacred as it is loyal to his lord and Emperor. If we meet again I shall win him for the white cross on the black mantle and the battle against the enemies of the faith."

"But, Eva," interrupted her sister, still under the spell of astonishment, "such conversation amid the merry music of the pipers!"

"'Wherever three Christians meet, even though they are only laymen, there is a church,' says Tertullian," Eva answered impressively. "One need not go to the house of God to talk about the things which ought to be the highest and dearest to every one; and Heinz Schorlin—I know it from his own lips—is of the same opinion, for he told me voluntarily that he would never forget the few hours which we had enjoyed together."

"Indeed!" said her sister thoughtfully. "But whether he does not owe this pleasure more to the dancing than to the edifying conversation——"

"Certainly not!" replied Eva, very positively. "I can prove it, too; for later, after he had heard many things about St. Clare, the female counterpart of Francis, he vowed to make her his patron saint. Or do you suppose that a knight changes his saints, as he does his doublet and coat of mail, without having any great and powerful motive? Do you think it possible that the idle pleasure of the dance led him to so important a decision?"

"Certainly not. Nothing led him to it except the irresistible zeal of my devout sister," answered

Els, smiling, as she continued to comb her fair hair. "She spoke with tongues in the ballroom, as the apostles did at Pentecost, and thus our 'little saint' performed her first miracle: the conversion of a godless knight during the dancing."

"Call it so, if you choose," replied Eva, her red lips pouting scornfully, as if she felt raised above such pitiful derision. "How you hurt, Els! You are pulling all the hair out of my head!"

The object of this rebuke had used the comb with the utmost care, but the great luxuriance of the long, fair, waving locks had presented many an impediment, and Eva seemed unusually sensitive that night. Els thought she knew why, and made no answer to the unjust charge. She knew her sister; and as she wound the braids about her head, and then, in the maid's place, hung part of her finery on hooks, and laid part carefully in the chest, she asked her numerous questions about the dance, but was vouchsafed only monosyllabic replies.

At last Els knelt before the *prie-dieu*. Eva did the same, resting her head so long upon her clasped hands that the patient older sister could not wait for the "Amen," but, in order not to disturb Eva's devotion, only pressed a light kiss upon her head and then carefully drew the curtains closely over the windows which, instead of glass, contained oiled parchment.

Eva's excitement filled her with anxiety. She

knew, too, what a powerful influence the bright moonlight sometimes exerted upon her while she slept, and cast another glance at the closely curtained window before she went to her own bed. There she lay a long time, with eyes wide open, pondering over her sister's words, and in doing so perceived more and more clearly that love was now knocking at the heart of the child kneeling before the *prie-dieu*. Sir Heinz Schorlin, the wild butterfly, desired to sip the honey from this sweet, untouched flower, and then probably abandon her like so many before her. Love and anxiety made the girl, whose opinion was usually milder than her sister's, a stern and unwise judge, for she assumed that the Swiss—whose character in reality was far removed from base hypocrisy—the man whom she had just termed a wolf, had donned sheep's clothing to make her poor lambkin an easier prey. But she was on guard and ready to spoil his game.

Did Eva really fail to understand the new feeling which had seized her so swiftly and powerfully? Did she lull herself in the delusion that she cared only for the welfare of the soul of the pious young knight?

Yes, it might be so, and prudent Els, who had watched her own little world intently enough, said to herself that it would be pouring oil upon the flames to tease Eva about the defeat which she, the "little saint," had sustained in the battle against

the demands of the world and of the feminine heart. Besides, her sister was too dear for her to rejoice in her humiliation. Els resolved not to utter a word about the Swiss unless compelled to do so.

Eva's prayers before retiring were often very long, but to-night it seemed as if they would never end.

"She is not appealing to St. Clare for herself alone, but for another," thought Els. "I spend less time in doing it. True, a Heinz Schorlin needs longer intercession than my Eva, my Wolff, and my poor pious mother. But I won't disturb her yet."

Sighing faintly, she changed her position, but remained sitting propped against the white pillows in order not to allow herself to be overcome by sleep. But it was a hard struggle, and her lids often fell, her head drooped upon her breast.

Dawn was already glimmering without when the supplicant at last rose and sought her couch. Her sister let her lie quietly for a while, then she rose and put out the lamp which Eva had forgotten to extinguish. The latter noticed it, turned her face towards her and called her gently. "To think that you should have to get up again, my poor Els! Give me a good-night kiss."

"Gladly, dearest," replied the other. "But it is really quite time to say 'good-morning.'"

"And you have kept awake so long!" replied Eva compassionately, as she threw her arms grate-

fully around her sister's neck, kissed her tenderly, and then pressed her hot cheek to hers.

"What is this?" cried Els, with sincere anxiety. "Are you hurt, child? Surely you are weeping?"

"No, no," was the reply. "I am only—I only thought that I had adorned myself, decked myself out with idle finery, although I know how many poor people are starving in want and misery, and how much more pleasing in the sight of the Lord is the grey robe of the cloistered nun. I could scarcely leave the hall in my overweening pleasure, and yet it would have beseemed me far better to share the sufferings of the crucified Saviour."

"But, child," replied Els, striving to soothe her sister, "how often I have heard from you and our aunt, the abbess, that no one was so cheerful and so glad to witness the enjoyment of human beings and animals as your St. Francis!"

"He—he!" groaned Eva, "he who attained the highest goal, who heard the voice of the Lord wherever he listened; he who chose poverty as his beloved bride, who scorned show and parade and the trappings of wealth, as he disdained earthly love; he who celebrated in song the love of the soul glowing for the highest things, as no troubadour could do—oh, how ardently he knew how to love, but to love the things which do not belong to this world!"

Els longed to ask what Eva knew about the ardent fire of love; but she restrained herself,

darkened the bed as well as she could with the movable curtain which hung from the ceiling on both sides above the double couch, and said: "Be sensible, child, and put aside such thoughts. How loudly the birds are twittering outside! If our father is obliged to breakfast alone there may be a storm, and I should be glad to have an hour's nap. You need slumber, too. Dancing is tiresome. Shut your eyes and sleep as long as you can. I'll be as quiet as a mouse while I am dressing."

As she spoke she turned away from her sister and no longer resisted the sleep which soon closed her weary eyes.

CHAPTER V.

As her father had ordered the servants not to disturb the young girls, Els did not wake till the sun was high in the heavens. Eva's place at her side was empty. She had already left the room. For the first time it had been impossible to sleep even a few short moments, and when she heard from the neighbouring cloister the ringing of the little bell that summoned the nuns to prayers, she could stay in bed no longer.

Usually she liked to dress slowly, thinking meanwhile of many things which stirred her soul. Sometimes while the maid or Els braided her hair she could read a book of devotion which the abbess had given her. But this morning she had carried the clothes she needed into the next room on tiptoe, that she might not wake her sister, and urged Kätterle, who helped her dress, to hurry.

She longed to see her aunt at the convent. While kneeling at the *prie-dieu*, she had reached the certainty that her patron saint had led Heinz Schorlin to her. He was her knight and she his lady, so he must render her obedience, and she would use it

to estrange him from the vanity of the world and make him a champion of the holy cause of the Church of Christ, the victorious conqueror of her foes. Sky-blue, the Holy Virgin's colour, should be hers, and thus his also, and every victory gained by the knight with the sky-blue on his helmet, under St. Clare's protection, would then be hers.

Heinz Schorlin was already one of the boldest and strongest knights; her love must render him also one of the most godly. Yes, her love! If St. Francis had not disdained to make a wolf his brother, why might she not feel herself the loving sister of a youth who would obey her as a noble falcon did his mistress, and whom she would teach to pursue the right quarry? The abbess would not forbid such love, and the impulse that drew her so strongly to the convent was the longing to know how her aunt would receive her confession.

The night before when, after her conversation with Els, she began to pray, she had feared that she had fallen into the snare of earthly love, and dreaded the confession which she had to make to her aunt Kunigunde. Now she found that it was no fleshly bond which united her to the knight. Oh, no! As St. Francis had gone forth to console, to win souls for the Lord, to bring peace and exhort to earnest labour in the service of the Saviour, as his disciples had imitated him, and St. Clare had been untiring in working, in his spirit, among women, she, too, would obey the call which had

come to her saint in Portiuncula, and prove herself for the first time, according to the Scripture, "a fisher of souls."

Now she gladly anticipated the meeting; for though her sister did not understand her, the abbess must know how to sympathise with what was passing in her mind. This expectation was fulfilled; for as soon as she was alone with her aunt she poured forth all her hopes and feelings without reserve, eagerly and joyfully extolling her good fortune that, through St. Clare, she had been enabled to find the noblest and most valiant knight, that she might win him for the Holy War under her saint's protection and to her honour.

The abbess, who knew women's hearts, had at first felt the same fear as Els; but she soon changed her opinion, and thought that she might be permitted to rejoice over the new emotion in her darling's breast.

No girl in love talked so openly and joyously of the conquest won, least of all would her truthful, excitable niece, whom she had drawn into her own path, speak thus of the man who disturbed her repose. No sensitive girl, unfamiliar with the world and scarcely beyond childhood, would decide with such steadfast firmness, so wholly free from every selfish wish, the future of the man dearest to her heart. No, no! Eva had already attained her new birth, and was not to be compared with other girls She had already once reached that

ecstatic rapture which followed only a long absorption in God and an active sympathy with the deep human love of the Saviour and the unspeakable sufferings which he had taken upon himself. Little was to be feared from earthly love for one who devoted herself with all the passion of her fervid nature to the divine Bridegroom. Among the many whom Kunigunde received into the convent as novices, she was most certainly "called." If she felt something which resembled love for the young knight—and she made no concealment of it—it was only the result of the sweet joy of winning for the Lord, the faith, and her saint a soul which seemed to her worthy of such grace.

Dear, highly gifted child!

She, the abbess Kunigunde, was willing it should be so, and that Eva should surpass herself. She should prove that genuine piety conquers even the yearning of a quickly throbbing heart.

True, she must keep her eyes open in order to prevent Satan, who is everywhere on the watch, from mingling in a game not wholly free from peril. But, on the other hand, the abbess intended to help her beloved niece to reap the reward of her piety.

It was scarcely to be doubted that Heinz Schorlin was fired with ardent love for Eva; but, for that very reason, he would be ready to yield her obedience, and therefore it was advisable to tell her exactly to what she must persuade him. She

must win him to join the Order of Malta, and if the famous champion of Marchfield performed heroic deeds with the white cross on his black mantle, or in war on his red tunic, he, the Emperor's favourite, would be sure of a high position among the military members of the order.

The young girl listened eagerly, but the elderly abbess herself became excited while encouraging the young future "Sister" to her noble task. The days when, with the inmates of the convent, she had prayed that the Emperor Rudolph might fulfil the Pope's desire, and in a new crusade again wrest the Holy Land from the infidels, came back to her memory, and Heinz Schorlin, guided by the nuns of St. Clare, seemed the man to bring the fulfilment of this old and cherished wish.

It appeared like a leading of the saints and a sign from God that Heinz had been dubbed a knight, and commenced his glorious career at Lausanne while the Emperor Rudolph pledged himself to a new crusade.

She detained Eva so long that dinner was over at the Ortlieb mansion, and her impatient father would have sent for her had not the invalid mother urged him to let her remain.

True, she longed to have a talk with her darling, who for the first time in her life had attended a great entertainment, and doubtless it grieved her to think that Eva did not feel the necessity of pouring out her heart to her own mother rather

than to any one else, and sharing with her all the new emotions which undoubtedly had thrilled it; but she knew her child, and would have considered it selfish to place any obstacle in the pathway to eternal salvation of the elect whom God summoned with so loud a voice. Formerly she would rather have seen the young girl, whose charms were developing into such rare beauty, wedded to some good man; but now she rejoiced in the idea that Eva was summoned to rule over the nuns in the neighbouring cloister some day as abbess, in the place of her sister-in-law Kunigunde. Her own days, she knew, were numbered, but where could her child more surely find the happiness she desired for her than with the beloved sisters of St. Clare, whose home she and her husband had helped to build?

Els had concealed from her parents what she fancied she had discovered, for any anxiety injured the invalid, and no one could anticipate how her irritable father might receive the information of her fear. On the other hand, she could confide her troubles without anxiety to Wolff, her betrothed husband. He was wise, prudent, loved Eva like a sister, and in exchanging thoughts with him she always discovered the right course to pursue; but though she expected him so eagerly and confidently, he did not come.

When, in the afternoon, Eva returned home, her whole manner expressed such firm, cheerful

composure that Els began to hope she might have been mistaken. The undemonstrative yet tender affection with which she met her mother, too, by no means harmonised with her fears.

How lovely the young girl looked as she sat on a low stool at the head of the invalid's couch and, with her mother's emaciated hand clasped in hers, told her all that she had seen and experienced the evening before! To please the beloved sufferer, she dwelt longer on the description of the gracious manner of the Emperor Rudolph and his sister to her and her father, the conversation with which the Burgrave had honoured her, and his son's invitation to dance. Then for the first time she mentioned Heinz Schorlin, whom she had found a godly knight, and finally spoke briefly of the distinguished foreign nobles and ladies whom he had pointed out and named.

All this reminded the mother of former days and, in spite of the warning of watchful Els not to talk too much, she did not cease questioning or recalling the time when she herself attended such festivals, and as one of the fairest maidens received much homage.

It had been a good day, for it was long since she had enjoyed so much quiet in her own home. The von Montforts, she told Eva, had set off early, with a great train of knights and servants, to ride to Radolzburg, the castle of the Burgrave von Zollern. Her father thought they would probably

have a dance there, for the young sons of the Burgrave would act as hosts.

Eva asked carelessly who rode with Cordula this time to submit to her whims, but Els perceived by her sister's flushed cheeks and the tone of her voice what she desired to know, and answered as if by accident that Sir Heinz Schorlin certainly was not one of her companions, for he had ridden through the Frauenthor that afternoon in the train of the Emperor Rudolph and his Bohemian daughter-in-law.

Twilight was already beginning to gather, and Els could not see whether this news afforded Eva pleasure or annoyance, for her mother had taken too little heed of her weakness, and one of the attacks which the physician so urgently ordered her to avoid by caution commenced.

Els and the convent Sister Renata, who helped her nurse the invalid, were now completely absorbed in caring for her, but Eva turned away from the beloved sufferer—her sensitive nature could not endure the sight of her convulsions.

As soon as her mother again lay weak but quiet on the pillows which Els had rearranged for her, Eva obeyed her entreaty to go away, and went to her own chamber. When another attack drew her back to the invalid, a sign from her sister as she reached the threshold bade her keep away from the couch. Should it prove necessary, she whispered, she would call her. If Wolff came, Eva was

to tell him that she could not leave her mother, but he must be sure to return early the next morning, as she had a great deal to say to him.

Eva then went to her father, who was dressing to attend a banquet at the house of Herr Berthold Vorchtel, the first Losunger* in the Council, from which he would be loath to absent himself for the very reason that his host's family had been hostile to him ever since the rumour of the betrothal of Wolff Eysvogel, whom the Vorchtels had regarded as their daughter Ursula's future husband.

Nevertheless, Herr Ernst would not have gone to the entertainment had his wife's condition given cause for anxiety. But he was familiar with these convulsions which, it is true, weakened the invalid, but produced no other results; so he permitted Eva to help him put the last touches to his dress, on which he lavished great care. Spick and span as if he were just out of a bandbox, the elderly man, before leaving the house, went once more to the sick-room, and Eva stood near as, after many questions and requests, he whispered something to Els which she did not hear. With excited curiosity she asked what he had said so secretly, but he only answered hurriedly, "The name of the Man in the Moon's dog," kissed her cheek, and ran downstairs.

At the foot he again turned to Eva and told her to send for him if her mother should grow

* A title given to the presiding officer of the Council.

worse, for these entertainments at the Vorchtels usually lasted a long time.

"Will the Eysvogels be there too?" asked the girl.

"Who knows," replied her father. "I shall be glad if Wolff comes."

The tone in which he uttered the name of his future son-in-law distinctly showed how little he desired to meet any other member of the family, and Eva said sympathisingly, "Then I hope you will have an opportunity to remember me to Wolff."

"Shall I say nothing to Ursel?" asked the father, pressing a good-night kiss upon the young girl's forehead.

"She would not care for it," was the reply. "It cannot be easy to forget a man like Wolff."

"I wish he had stuck to Ursel, and let Els alone," her father answered angrily. "It would have been better for both."

"Why, father," interrupted Eva reproachfully, "do not our lovers seem really created for each other?"

"If the Eysvogels were only of the same opinion," exclaimed Ernst Ortlieb, shrugging his shoulders with a faint sigh. "Whoever marries, child, weds not only a man or a woman; all their kindred, unhappily, must be taken into the bargain. However, Els did not lack earnest warning. When

your time comes, girl, your father will be more careful."

Smiling tenderly, he passed his hand over the little cap which covered her thick, fair hair, and went out.

Eva returned to her room and sat down at the spinning-wheel in the bow window, where Kätterle had just drawn the curtains closely and lighted the hanging lamp. But the distaff remained untouched, and her thoughts wandered swiftly to the evening before and the ball at the Town Hall. Heinz Schorlin's image rose more and more distinctly before her mind, and this pleased her, for she fancied that he wore on his helm the blue favour which she had chosen, and it led her to consider against what foe she should first send him in the service of his lady and the Holy Church.

CHAPTER VI.

Eva had gazed into vacancy a long time, and beheld a succession of pleasing pictures, in every one of which Heinz Schorlin appeared. Once, in imagination, she placed a wreath on his helmet after a great victory over the infidels.

Why should not this vision become a reality?

Doubtless it owed its origin to a memory, for Wolff Eysvogel had been fired with love for her sister while Els was winding laurel around his helmet.

After the Honourable Council had resolved that the youths belonging to noble families, who had fought in the battle of Marchfield and returned victorious, should be adorned with wreaths by the maidens of their choice, Fate had appointed her sister to crown Eysvogel.

At that time Wolff had but recently recovered from the severe wounds with which he had returned from the campaign. But while he knelt before Els and his eyes met hers, love had overmastered him so swiftly and powerfully, that at the end of a few days he determined to woo her.

Meanwhile his own family resolutely opposed his choice. The father declared that he had made an agreement with Berthold Vorchtel to marry him to his daughter Ursula, and withdrawal on his son's part would embarrass him. His grandmother, the arrogant old Countess Rotterbach, agreed with him, and declared that Wolff ought to wed no one except a lady of the most aristocratic birth or an heiress like Ursula. Her daughter Rosalinde Eysvogel, as usual, was the echo of her mother.

Herr Ernst Ortlieb, too, would far rather have seen his Els marry into another home; but Wolff himself was a young man of such faultless honour, and the bride he had chosen was so eager to become his, that he deemed it a duty to forget the aversion inspired by the suitor's family.

As for Wolff, he had so firmly persisted in his resolve that his parents at last permitted him to ask for his darling's hand, but his father had made it a condition that the betrothal, on account of the youth of the lovers, should not be announced till after Wolff had returned from Milan, where he was to finish the studies commenced in Venice. True, everyone had supposed that they were completed long ago, but Eysvogel senior insisted upon his demand, and afterwards succeeded in deferring the announcement of the betrothal, until the resolute persistence of Wolff, who meanwhile had entered the great commercial house, and the wish of his own aged mother, a sensible woman, who from

the first had approved her grandson's choice and to whom Herr Casper was obliged to show a certain degree of consideration, compelled him to give it publicity.

A few days later Herr Casper's brother died, and soon after his estimable old mother. He used these events as a pretext for longer delay, saying that both he and his wife needed at least six months' interval ere they could forget their mourning in a gay wedding festival. Besides, he would prefer not to have the marriage take place until after Wolff's election to the Council, which, in all probability, would occur after Walpurgis of the coming year.

Ernst Ortlieb had sullenly submitted to all this. Nothing but his love for his child and respect for Herr Casper's dead mother, who had taken Els to her heart like a beloved granddaughter, would have enabled him to conquer his hasty temper in his negotiations with the man whom he detested in his inmost soul, and not hurl back the consent so reluctantly granted to his son.

The friends who knew him admired the strength of will with which he governed his impetuous nature in this transaction. Some asserted that secret obligations compelled him to yield to the rich Eysvogel; for though the Ortlieb mercantile house was reputed wealthy, the business prudence of its head resulted in smaller profits, and people had not forgotten that it had suffered heavy

losses during the terrible period of despotism which had preceded the Emperor Rudolph's accession to the throne.

The insecurity of the high-roads had injured every merchant, but in trying to find some explanation for Herr Ortlieb's submission the attacks which had cost him one and another train of wares were regarded as specially disastrous.

Finally, the dowry which Els was to bring bore no comparison to the large sums Ernst Ortlieb had lavished upon the erection of the St. Clare Convent, and hence it was inferred that the wealth of the firm had sustained considerable losses. This found ready credence, owing to the retired life led by the Ortliebs,—whose house had formerly been one of the most hospitable in the city,—ever since the wife had become an invalid and Eva had grown up with an aversion to the world. Few took the trouble to inquire into the very apparent causes for the change.

Yet this view of the matter was opposed by many—nay, when the conversation turned upon these subjects, Herr Berthold Vorchtel, perhaps the richest and most distinguished man in Nuremberg, who rented the imperial taxes, made comments from which, had it not been so difficult to believe, people might have inferred that Casper Eysvogel was indebted to Ernst Ortlieb rather than the latter to him.

Yet the cautious, prudent man never explained

the foundation of his opinion, for he very rarely mentioned either of the two firms; yet prior to the battle of Marchfield he had believed that his own daughter Ursula and Wolff Eysvogel would sooner or later wed. Herr Casper, the young man's father, had strengthened this expectation. He himself and his wife esteemed Wolff, and his "Ursel" had shown plainly enough that she preferred him to the other friends of her elder brother Ulrich.

When he returned home the two met like brother and sister, and the parents of Ursula Vorchtel had expected Wolff's proposal until the day on which the wreaths were bestowed had made them poorer by a favourite wish and destroyed the fairest hope of their daughter Ursula.

The worthy merchant, it is true, deemed love a beautiful thing, but in Nuremberg it was the parents who chose wives and husbands for their sons and daughters; yet, after marriage, love took possession of the newly wedded pair. A transgression of this ancient custom was very rare, and even though Wolff's heart was fired with love for Els Ortlieb, his father, Herr Vorchtel thought, should have refused his consent to the betrothal, especially as he had already treated Ursel as his future daughter. Some compulsion must have been imposed upon him when he permitted his son to choose a wife other than the one selected.

But what could render one merchant dependent upon another except business obligations?—and

Berthold Vorchtel was sharp-sighted. He knew the heavy draft which Herr Casper had made upon the confidence reposed in the old firm, and thought he had perceived that the great splendour displayed by the women of the Eysvogel family, the liberality with which Herr Casper had aided his impoverished noble relatives, and the lavish expenditure of his son-in-law, the debt-laden Sir Seitz Siebenburg, drew too heavily upon the revenues of the ancient house.

Even now Casper Eysvogel's whole conduct proved how unwelcome was his son's choice. To him, Ursula's father, he still intimated on many an occasion that he had by no means resigned every hope of becoming, through his son, more nearly allied to his family, for a betrothal was not a wedding.

Berthold Vorchtel, however, was not the man to enter into such double-dealing, although he saw plainly enough how matters stood with his poor child. She had confided her feelings to no one; yet, in spite of Ursula's reserved nature, even a stranger could perceive that something clouded her happiness. Besides, she had persistently refused the distinguished suitors who sought the wealthy Herr Berthold's pretty daughter, and only very recently had promised her parents, of her own free will, to give up her opposition to marriage.

Ever since the betrothal, to the sincere sorrow

of Els, she had studiously avoided Wolff's future bride, who had been one of her dearest friends; and Ulrich, Herr Vorchtel's oldest son, took his sister's part, and at every opportunity showed Wolff—who from a child, and also in the battle of Marchfield, had been a favourite comrade—that he bore him a grudge, and considered his betrothal to any one except Ursula an act of shameful perfidy.

The fair-minded father did not approve of his son's conduct, for his wife had learned from her daughter that Wolff had never spoken to her of love, or promised marriage.

Therefore, whenever Herr Berthold Vorchtel met Els's father—and this often happened in the Council—he treated him with marked respect, and when there was an entertainment in his house sent him an invitation, as in former years, which Ernst Ortlieb accepted, unless something of importance prevented.

But though the elder Vorchtel was powerless to change his children's conduct, he never wearied of representing to his son how unjust and dangerous were the attacks with which, on every occasion, he irritated Wolff, whose strength and skill in fencing were almost unequalled in Nuremberg. In fact, the latter would long since have challenged his former friend had he not been so conscious of his own superiority, and shrunk from the thought of bringing fresh sorrow upon Ursula and

her parents, whom he still remembered with friendly regard.

Eva was fond of her future brother-in-law, and it had not escaped her notice that of late something troubled him.

What was it?

She thoughtfully gave the wheel a push, and as it turned swiftly she remembered the Swiss dance the evening before, and suddenly clenched her small right hand and dealt the palm of her left a light blow.

She fancied that she had discovered the cause of Wolff's depression, for she again saw distinctly before her his sister Isabella's husband, Sir Seitz Siebenburg, as he swung Countess Cordula around so recklessly that her skirt, adorned with glittering jewels, fluttered far out from her figure. In the room adjacent to the hall he had flung himself upon his knees before the countess, and Eva fancied she again beheld his big, red face, with its long, thick, yellow mustache, whose ends projected on both sides in a fashion worn by few men of his rank. The expression of the watery blue eyes, with which he stared Cordula in the face, were those of a drunkard.

To-day he had followed her to the Kadolzburg, and probably meant to spend the night there. So Wolff had ample reason to be anxious about his sister and her peace of mind. That must be it!

Perhaps he would yet come that evening, to give Els at least a greeting from the street. How late was it?

She hastily tried to draw the curtains aside from the window, but this was not accomplished as quickly as she expected—they had been carefully fastened with pins. Eva noticed it, and suddenly remembered her father's whispered words to Els.

They were undoubtedly about the window. According to the calendar, the moon would be full that day, and she knew very well that it had a strange influence upon her. True, within the past year it appeared to have lost its power; but formerly, especially when she had devoted herself very earnestly to religious exercises, she had often, without knowing how or why, left her bed and wandered about, not only in her chamber but through the house. Once she had climbed to the dovecot in the courtyard, and another time had mounted to the garret where, she did not know in what way, she had been awakened. When she looked around, the moon was shining into the spacious room, and showed her that she was perched on one of the highest beams in the network of rafters which, joined with the utmost skill, supported the roof. Below her yawned a deep gulf, and as she looked down into it she was seized with such terror that she uttered a loud shriek for help, and did not recover her calmness until the

old housekeeper, Martsche, who had started from her bed in alarm, brought her father to her.

She had been taken down with the utmost care. No one was permitted to help except white-haired Nickel, the old head packer, who often let a whole day pass without opening his lips; for Herr Ernst seemed to lay great stress upon keeping the moon's influence on Eva a secret. There was indeed something uncanny about this night-walking, for even now it seemed incomprehensible how she had reached the beam, which was at least the height of three men above the floor. A fall might have cost her life, and her father was right in trying to prevent a repetition of such nocturnal excursions. This time Els had helped him.

How faithfully she cared for them all!

Yes, she had barred out even the faintest glimmer. Eva smiled as she saw the numerous pins with which her sister had fastened the curtain, and an irresistible longing seized her to see once more the wonderful light that promoted the growth of the hair if cut during its increase, and also exerted so strange an influence upon her.

She *must* look up at the moon!

Swiftly and skilfully, as if aided by invisible hands, her dainty fingers opened curtain and window.

Drawing a deep breath, with an emotion of pleasure which she had not experienced for a long time, she gazed at the linden before the house

steeped in silvery radiance, and upward to the pure disk of the full moon sailing in the cloudless sky.

How beautiful and still the night was! How delightful it would be to walk up and down the garden, with her aunt the abbess, with Els, and perhaps—she felt the blood crimson her cheeks—with Heinz Schorlin!

Where was he now?

Undoubtedly with the Emperor and his ladies, perhaps at the side of the Bohemian princess, the young Duchess Agnes, who yesterday had so plainly showed her pleasure in his society.

Just then the watch, marching from the Marienthurn to the Frauenthor, gave her vagrant thoughts a new turn. The city guard was soon followed by a troop of horse, which probably belonged to the Emperor's train.

It was delightful to gaze, at this late hour, into the moonlit street, and she wondered that she had never enjoyed it before. True, it would have been still pleasanter had Els borne her company; and, besides, she longed to tell her the new explanation she had found for Wolff's altered manner.

Perhaps her mother was asleep, and she could come with her.

How still the house was!

Cautiously opening the door of the sick-room, she glanced in. Els was standing at the head of the bed, supporting her mother with her strong young arms, while Sister Renata pushed the cush-

ions between the sufferer's back and the bedstead.

The old difficulty of breathing had evidently attacked her again.

Yes, yes, the dim light of the lamp was shining on her pale face, and the large sunken eyes were gazing with imploring anguish at the image of the Virgin on the opposite wall.

How gladly Eva would have afforded her relief! She looked with a faint sense of envy at her sister, whose skilful, careful hands did everything to the satisfaction of the beloved sufferer, while in nursing she failed only too often in giving the right touch. But she could pray—implore the aid of her saint very fervently; nay, she was more familiar with her, and might hope that she would fulfil a heartfelt wish of hers more quickly than for her sister. It would not do to call Els to the window.

She closed the door gently, returned to her chamber, knelt and implored St. Clare, with all the fervour of her heart, to grant her mother a good night. Then she again drew the curtains closely over the window, and went to call Kätterle to help her undress.

But the maid was just entering with fresh water.

What was the matter with her?

Her hand trembled as she braided her young mistress's hair and sometimes, with a faint sigh, she stopped the movement of the comb.

Her silence could be easily explained; for Eva

had often forbidden Kätterle to talk, when she disturbed her meditation. Yet the girl must have had some special burden on her mind, for when Eva had gone to bed she could not resolve to leave the room, but remained standing on the threshold in evident embarrassment.

Eva encouraged her to speak, and Kätterle, so confused that she often hesitated for words and pulled at her ribbons till she was in danger of tearing them from her white apron, stammered that she did not come on her own account, but for another person. It was well known in the household that her betrothed husband, the true and steadfast Walther Biberli, served a godly knight, her countryman.

"I know it," said Eva with apparent composure, "and your Biberli has commissioned you to bear me the respectful greeting of Sir Heinz Schorlin."

The girl looked at her young mistress in surprise. She had been prepared for a sharp rebuke, and had yielded to her lover's entreaties to undertake this service amid tears, and with great anxiety; for if her act should be betrayed, she would lose, amid bitter reproaches, the place she so greatly prized. Yet Biberli's power over her and her faith in him were so great that she would have followed him into a lion's den; and it had scarcely seemed a more desirable venture to carry a love-greeting to the pious maiden who held men

in such disfavour, and could burst into passionate anger as suddenly as her father.

And now?

Eva had expected such a message.

It seemed like a miracle to Kätterle.

With a sigh of relief, and a hasty thanksgiving to her patron saint, she at once began to praise the virtue and piety of the servant as well as his lord; but Eva again interrupted, and asked what Sir Heinz Schorlin desired.

Kätterle, with new-born confidence, repeated, as if it were some trivial request, the words Biberli had impressed upon her mind.

"By virtue of the right of every good and devout knight to ask his lady for her colour, Sir Heinz Schorlin, with all due reverence, humbly prays you to name yours; for how could he hold up his head before you and all the knights if he were denied the privilege of wearing it in your honour, in war as well as in peace?"

Here her mistress again interrupted with a positive "I know," and, still more emboldened, Kätterle continued the ex-schoolmaster's lesson to the end:

"His lord, my lover says, will wait here beneath the window, in all reverence, though it should be till morning, until you show him your sweet face. No, don't interrupt me yet, Mistress Eva, for you must know that Sir Heinz's lady mother committed her dear son to my Biberli's

care, that he might guard him from injury and illness. But since his master met you, he has been tottering about as though he had received a spear-thrust, and as the knight confessed to his faithful servitor that no leech could help him until you permitted him to open his heart to you and show you with what humble devotion——"

But here the maid was interrupted in a manner very different from her expectations, for Eva had raised herself on her pillows and, almost unable to control her voice in the excess of her wrath, exclaimed:

"The master who presumes to seek through his servant—— And by what right does the knight dare thus insolently—— But no! Who knows what modest wish was transformed in your mouth to so unprecedented a demand? He desired to see my face? He wanted to speak to me in person, to confess I know not what? From you—you, Kätterle, the maid—the knight expects——"

Here she struck her little hand angrily against the wood of the bedstead and, panting for breath, continued:

"I'll show him!—— Yet no! What I have to answer no one else—— From me, from me alone, he shall learn without delay. There is paper in yonder chest, on the very top; bring it to me, with pen and ink."

Kätterle silently hurried to obey this order, but

Eva pressed her hand upon her heaving bosom, and gazed silently into vacancy.

The manservant and the maid whom Heinz Schorlin had made his messengers certainly could have no conception of the bond that united her to him; even her own sister had misunderstood it. He should now learn that Eva Ortlieb knew what beseemed her! But she, too, longed for another meeting, and this conduct rendered it necessary.

The sooner they two had a conversation, the better. She could confidently venture to invite him to the meeting which she had in view; her aunt, the abbess, had promised to stand by her side, if she needed her, in her intercourse with the knight.

But her colour?

Kätterle had long since laid the paper and writing materials before her, but she still pondered.

At last, with a smile of satisfaction, she seized the pen. The manner in which she intended to mention the colour should show him the nature of the bond which united them.

She was mistress of the pen, for in the convent she had copied the gospels, the psalms, and other portions of the Scriptures, yet her hand trembled as she committed the following lines to the paper:

"I am angered—nay, even grieved—that you, a godly knight, who knows the reverence due to a lady, have ventured to await my greeting in front

of my father's house. If you are a true knight, you must be aware that you voluntarily promised to obey my every glance. I can rely upon this pledge, and since I find it necessary to talk with you, I invite you to an interview—when and where, my maid, who is betrothed to your servant, shall inform him. A friend, who has your welfare at heart as well as mine, will be with me. It must be soon, with the permission of St. Clare, who, since you have chosen her for your patron saint, looks down upon you as well as on me.

"As for my colour, I know not what to name; the baubles associated with earthly love are unfamiliar to me. But blue is the colour of the pure heaven and its noble queen, the gracious Virgin. If you make this colour yours and fight for it, I shall rejoice, and am willing to name it mine."

At the bottom of the little note she wrote only her Christian name "Eva," and when she read it over she found that it contained, in apt and seemly phrases, everything that she desired to say to the knight.

While folding the paper and considering how she could fasten it, as there was no wax at hand, she thought of the narrow ribbons with which Els tied together, in sets of half a dozen, the fine kerchiefs worn over the neck and bosom, when they came from the wash. They were sky-blue, and nothing could be more suitable for the purpose.

Kätterle brought one from the top of the chest. Eva wound it swiftly around the little roll, and the maid hastily left the room, sure of the gratitude of the true and steadfast Biberli.

When Eva was again alone, she at first thought that she might rejoice over her hasty act; but on asking herself what Els would say, she felt certain that she would disapprove of it and, becoming disconcerted, began to imagine what consequences it might entail.

The advice which her father had recently given Wolff, never to let any important letter pass out of his hands until at least one night had elapsed, returned to her memory, and from that instant the little note burdened her soul like a hundred-pound weight.

She would fain have started up to get it back again, and a strong attraction drew her towards the window to ascertain whether Heinz Schorlin had really come and was awaiting her greeting.

Perhaps Kätterle had not yet delivered the note. What if she were still standing at the door of the house to wait for Biberli? If, to be absolutely certain, she should just glance out, that would not be looking for the knight, and she availed herself of the excuse without delay.

In an instant she sprang from her bed and gently drew the curtain aside. The street was perfectly still. The linden and the neighbouring houses cast dark, sharply outlined shadows upon

the light pavement, and from the convent garden the song of the nightingale echoed down the quiet moonlit street.

Kätterle had probably already given the note to Heinz Schorlin who, obedient to his lady's command, as beseemed a knight, had gone away. This soothed her anxiety, and with a sigh she went back to bed.

But the longing to look out into the street again was so strong that she yielded to the temptation; yet, ere she reached the window, she summoned the strength of will which was peculiar to her and, lying down, once more closed her lids, with the firm resolve to see and hear nothing. As she had not shut her eyes the night before and, from dread of the ball, had slept very little during the preceding one, she soon, though the moon was shining in through the parted curtains, lapsed into a condition midway between sleep and waking. Extreme fatigue had deadened consciousness, yet she fancied that at times she heard the sound of footsteps on the pavement outside, and the deep voices of men.

Nor was what she heard in her half-dozing state, which was soon followed by the sound slumber of youth, any delusion of the senses.

CHAPTER VII.

THE moon found something in front of the Ortlieb house worth looking at. Rarely had she lighted with purer, brighter radiance the pathway of the mortals who excited her curiosity, than that of the two handsome young men who, at a moderate interval of time, passed through the Frauenthor, and finally entered the courtyard of the Ortlieb residence almost at the same instant.

Luna first saw them pace silently to and fro, and delighted in the resentful glances they cast at each other. This joy increased as the one in the long coat, embroidered on the shoulder with birds, and then the other, whose court costume well became his lithe, powerful limbs, sat down, each on one of the chains connecting the granite posts between the street and the courtyard.

The very tall one, who looked grave and anxious, was Wolff Eysvogel; the other, somewhat shorter, who swung gaily to and fro on the chain as if it afforded him much amusement, Heinz Schorlin.

Both frequently glanced up at the lighted bow-

window and the smaller one on the second story, behind which Eva lay half asleep. This was the first meeting of the two men.

Wolff, aware of his excellent right to remain on this spot, would have shown the annoying intruder his displeasure long before, had he not supposed that the other, whom at the first glance he recognised as a knight, was one of Countess Cordula von Montfort's admirers. Yet he soon became unable to control his anger and impatience. Yielding to a hasty impulse, he left the chain, but as he approached the stranger the latter gave his swaying seat a swifter motion and, without vouchsafing him either greeting or introductory remark, said carelessly, "This is a lovely night."

"I am of the same opinion," replied Wolff curtly. "But I would like to ask, sir, what induced you to choose the courtyard of this house to enjoy it?"

"Induced?" asked the Swiss in astonishment; then, looking the other in the face with defiant sharpness, he added scornfully:

"I am warming the chain because it suits me to do so."

"You are allowed the pleasure," returned Wolff in an irritated tone; "nay, I can understand that night birds of your sort find no better amusement. Still, it seems to me that a knight who wishes to keep iron hot might attain his object better in another way."

"Why, of course," cried Heinz Schorlin, springing swiftly to his feet with rare elasticity. "It gives a pleasant warmth when blade strikes blade or the hot blood wets them. I am no friend to darkness, and it seems to me, sir, as if we were standing in each other's light here."

"There our opinions concur for the second time this lovely night," quietly replied the patrician's son, conscious of his unusual strength and skill in fencing, with a slight touch of scorn. "Like you, I am always ready to cross blades with another; only, the public street is hardly the fitting place for it."

"May the plague take you!" muttered the Swiss in assent to Wolff's opinion. "Besides, sir, whoever grasps iron so swiftly is worth a parley. To ask whether you are of knightly lineage would be useless trouble, and should it come to a genuine sword-dance——"

"You will find a partner in me at any time," was the reply, "as I, who wear my ancient escutcheon with good right, would gladly give you a crimson memento of this hour—though you were but the son of a cobbler. But first let us ascertain —for I, too, dislike darkness—whether we are really standing in each other's light. With all due respect for your fancy for warming chains, it would be wise, ere Sir Red Coat* puts his round our

* The executioner.

ankles for disturbing the peace, to have a sensible talk."

"Try it, for aught I care," responded Heinz Schorlin cheerily. "Unluckily for me, I live in a state of perpetual feud with good sense. One thing, however, seems certain without any serious reflection: the attraction which draws me here, as well as you, will not enter the cloister as a monk, but as a little nun, wears no beard, but braids her hair. Briefly, then, if you are here for Countess Cordula von Montfort's sake, your errand is vain; she will sleep at Kadolzburg to-night."

"May her slumber be sweet!" replied Wolff calmly. "She is as near to me as yonder moon."

"That gives the matter a more serious aspect," cried the knight angrily. "You or I. What is your lady's name?"

"That, to my mind, is asking too much," replied Wolff firmly.

"And the law of love gives you the right to withhold an answer. But, sir, we must nevertheless learn for the sake of what fairest fair we have each foregone sleep."

"Then tell me, by your favour, your lady's *colour*," Wolff asked the Swiss.

The latter laughed gaily: "I am still putting that question to my saint."

Then, noticing Wolff's shake of the head, he went on in a more serious tone: "If you will have

a little patience, I hope I may be able to tell you, ere we part."

This assurance also seemed to Wolff an enigma.

Who in the wide world would come from under the respectable Ortlieb roof, at this hour, to tell a stranger anything whatsoever concerning one of its daughters? Neither could have given him the right to regard her as his lady, and steal at night, like a marten, around the house which contained his dearest treasure. This obscurity was an offence to Wolff Eysvogel, and he was not the man to submit to it. Yonder insolent fellow should learn, to his hurt, that he had made a blunder.

But scarcely had he begun to explain to Heinz that he claimed the right to protect both the daughters of this house, the younger as well as the older, since they had no brother, when the knight interrupted:

"Oho! There are two of them, and she, too, spoke of a sister. So, if it comes to sharing, sir, we need not emulate the judgment of Solomon. Let us see! The colour is uncertain, but to every Christian mortal a name clings as closely as a shadow and, if I mention the initial letter of the one which adorns my lady, I believe I shall commit no offence that a court of love could condemn. The initial, which I like because it is daintily rounded and not too difficult to write—mark it well—is 'E.'"

Wolff Eysvogel started slightly and gripped the

dagger in his belt, but instantly withdrew his hand and answered with mingled amusement and indignation: "Thanks for your good will, Sir Knight, but this, too, brings us no nearer our goal; the E is the initial of both the Ortlieb sisters. The elder who, as you may know, is my betrothed bride, bears the name of Elizabeth, or Els, as we say in Nuremberg."

"And the younger," cried Heinz joyously, "honours with her gracious innocence the name of her through whom sin came into the world."

"But you, Sir Knight," exclaimed Wolff fiercely, "would do better not to name sin and Eva Ortlieb in the same breath. If you are of a different opinion——"

"Then," interrupted the Swiss, "we come back to warming the iron."

"As you say," cried Wolff resolutely. "In spite of the peace of the country, I will be at your service at any time. As you see, I went out unarmed, and it would not be well done to cross swords here."

"Certainly not," Heinz assented. "But many days and nights will follow this moonlight one, and that you may have little difficulty in finding me whenever you desire, know that my name is Heinrich—or to more intimate friends, among whom you might easily be numbered if we don't deprive each other of the pleasure of meeting again under the sun—Heinz Schorlin."

"Schorlin?" asked Wolff in surprise. "Then you are the knight who, when a beardless boy, cut down on the Marchfield the Bohemian whose lance had slain the Emperor's charger, the Swiss who aided him to mount the steed of Ramsweg of Thurgau—your uncle, if I am not mistaken—and then took the wild ride to bring up the tall Capeller, with his troops, who so gloriously decided the day."

"And," laughed Heinz, "who was finally borne off the field as dead before the fulfilment of his darling wish to redden Swiss steel with royal Bohemian blood. This closed the chronicle, Herr—what shall I call you?"

"Wolff Eysvogel, of Nuremberg," replied the other.

"Aha! A son of the rich merchant where the Duke of Gülich found quarters?" cried the Swiss, lifting his cap bordered with fine miniver. "May confusion seize me! If I were not my father's son, I wouldn't mind changing places with you. It must make the neck uncommonly stiff, methinks, to have a knightly escutcheon on door and breast, and yet be able to fling florins and zecchins broadcast without offending the devil by an empty purse. If you don't happen to know how such a thing looks, I can show you."

"Yet rumour says," observed Wolff, "that the Emperor is gracious to you, and knows how to fill it again."

"If one doesn't go too far," replied Heinz, "and my royal master, who lacks spending money himself only too often, doesn't keep his word that it was done for the last time. I heard that yesterday morning, and thought that the golden blessing which preceded it would last the dear saints only knew how long. But ere the cock had crowed even once this morning the last florin had vanished. Dice, Herr Wolff Eysvogel—dice!"

"Then I would keep my hands off them," said the other meaningly.

"If the Old Nick or some one else did not always guide them back! Did you, a rich man's son, never try what the dice would do for you?"

"Yes, Sir Knight. It was at Venice, where I was pursuing my studies, and tried my luck at gambling on many a merry evening with other sons of mercantile families from Nuremberg, Augsburg, and Cologne."

"And your feathers were generously plucked?"

"By no means. I usually left a winner. But after they fleeced a dear friend from Ulm, and he robbed his master, I dropped dice."

"And you did so as easily as if it were a short fast after an abundant meal?"

"It was little more difficult," Wolff asserted. "My father would have gladly seen me outdo my countrymen, and sent me more money than I needed. Why should I deprive honest fellows who had less?"

"That's just the difficulty," cried his companion eagerly. "It was easy for you to renounce games of chance because your winnings only added more to the rest, and you did not wish to pluck poorer partners. But I! A poor devil like me cannot maintain armour-bearer, servants, and steeds out of what the dear little mother at home in her faithful care can spare from crops and interest. How could we succeed in making a fair appearance at court and in the tournament if it were not for the dice? And then, when I lose, I again become but the poor knight the saints made me; when I win, on the contrary, I am the great and wealthy lord I would have been born had the Lord permitted me to choose my own cradle. Besides, those who lose through me are mainly dukes, counts, and gentlemen with rich fiefs and fat bourgs, whom losing doubtless benefits, as bleeding relieves a sick man. What suits the soldier does not befit the merchant. We live wholly amid risks and wagers. Every battle, every skirmish is a game whose stake is life. Whoever reflects long is sure to lose. If I could only describe, Herr Eysvogel, what it is to dash headlong upon the foe!"

"I could imagine that vividly enough," Wolff eagerly interposed. "I, too, have broken many a lance in the lists and shed blood enough."

"What a dunce I am!" cried Heinz in amazement, pressing his hand upon his brow. "That's

why your face was so familiar! By my saint! I am no knight if I did not see you then, before the battle waxed hot. It was close beside your Burgrave Frederick, who held aloft the imperial banner."

"Probably," replied Wolff in a tone of assent. "He sometimes entrusted the standard to me, when it grew too heavy for his powerful arm, because I was the tallest and the strongest of our Nuremberg band. But, unluckily, I could not render this service long. A scimitar gashed my head. The larger part of the little scar is hidden under my hair."

"The little scar!" repeated Heinz gaily. "It was wide enough, at any rate, for the greatest soul to slip through it. A scar on the head from a wound received four years ago, and yet distinctly visible in the moonlight!"

"It should serve as a warning," replied Wolff, glancing anxiously up the street. "If the patrol, or any nocturnal reveller should catch sight of us, it would be ill for the fair fame of the Ortlieb sisters, for everybody knows that only one—Els's betrothed lover—has a right to await a greeting here at so late an hour. So follow me into the shadow of the linden, I entreat you; for yonder—surely you see it too—a figure is gliding towards us."

Heinz Schorlin's laugh rang out like a bell as he whispered to the Nuremberg patrician: "That figure is familiar to me, and neither we nor our

ladies need fear any evil from it. Excuse me a moment, and I'll wager twenty gold florins against yonder linden leaf that, ere the moonlight has left the curbstone, I can tell you my lady's colour."

As he spoke he hastened towards the figure, now standing motionless within the shadow of the door-post beside the lofty entrance.

Wolff Eysvogel remained alone, gazing thoughtfully upon the ground.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE silent wanderer above had expected to behold a scene very unlike an interview between two men. The latter required neither her purest, fullest light, nor the shadow of a blossoming linden.

Now Luna saw the young Nuremberg merchant gaze after the Swiss with an expression of such deep anxiety and pain upon his manly features that she felt the utmost pity for him. He did not look upward as usual to the window of his beautiful Els, but either fixed his eyes upon the spot where his new acquaintance was conversing with another person, or bent them anxiously upon the ground.

As Wolff thought of Heinz Schorlin, it seemed as if Fate had thrown him into the way of the Swiss that he might feel with twofold anguish the thorns besetting his own life path. The young knight was proffered the rose without the thorn. What cares had he? The present threw into his lap its fairest blessings, and when he looked into the future he beheld only the cheering buds of hope.

Yet this favourite of fortune had expressed a

desire to change places with him. The thought that many others, too, would be glad to step into his shoes tortured Wolff's honest heart as though he himself were to blame for the delusion of these short-sighted folk.

Apart from his strength and health, his well-formed body, his noble birth, his faith in the love of his betrothed bride—at this hour he forgot how much these things were—he found nothing in his lot which seemed worth desiring.

He might not even rejoice in his stainless honesty with the same perfect confidence as in his betrothal.

Yes, he had cared for noble old Berthold Vorchtel's daughter as if she were his sister. He had even found pleasure in the thought that Ursula was destined to become his wife, yet no word either of love or allusion to future marriage had been exchanged between them. He had felt free, and had a right to consider himself so, when love for Els Ortlieb overwhelmed him so swiftly and powerfully.

Yet Ursula and her oldest brother treated him as if he had been guilty of base disloyalty. His pure conscience, however, enabled him to endure this more easily than the other burden, of which he became aware on the long-anticipated day when his father made him a partner in the old firm and gave him an insight into the condition of the property and the course of the business.

Then he had learned the heavy losses which had

been sustained recently, and the sad disparity existing between the great display by which his father and mother, as well as his grandmother, the countess, maintained the appearance of their former princely wealth, and the balances of the last few years.

When he had just boasted to the reckless young knight that he had given up gaming, he told but half the truth, for though since his period of study in Venice, and later in Milan, he had not touched dice, he had been forced to consent to a series of enterprises undertaken by his father, whose stakes were far different from the gambling of the knights and nobles at the Green Shield or in the camp.

Yet he intended to bind the fate of the woman he loved to his own, for Els, spite of the opposition of his family, would have been already indissolubly united to him, had not one failure after another destroyed his courage to take her hand. Finally, he deemed it advisable to await the result of the last great enterprise, now on the eve of decision. It might compensate for many of the losses of recent years. Should it be favourable, the heaviest burden would be lifted from his soul; in the opposite case the old house would be shaken to its foundations. Yet even its fall would have been easier for him to endure than this cruel uncertainty, to which was added the torturing anxiety of bearing the responsibility of things for which he was not to blame, and of which, moreover, he was even denied a clear

view. Yet he felt absolutely certain that his father was concealing many things, perhaps the worst, and often felt as if he were walking in the darkness over a mouldering bridge. Ah, if it could only be propped up, and then rebuilt! But if it must give way, he hoped the catastrophe would come soon. He knew that he possessed the strength to build a new home for Els and himself. Even were it small and modest, it should be erected on a firm foundation and afford a safe abode for its inmates.

What did the young, joyous-hearted fellow who was wooing Eva know of such cares? Fate had placed him on the sunny side of life, where everything flourished, and set him, Wolff, in the shade, where grass and flowers died.

There is a magic in fame which the young soul cannot easily escape, and the name of Heinz Schorlin was indeed honoured and on every lip. The imagination associated with it the cheerful nature which, like a loyal comrade, goes hand in hand with success, deserved and undeserved good fortune, woman's favour, doughty deeds, the highest and strongest traits of character.

An atmosphere like sunshine, which melts all opposition, emanated from Heinz. Wolff had experienced it himself. He had seriously intended to make the insolent intruder feel his strong arm, but since he had learned the identity of the Swiss his acts and nature appeared in a new light. His insolence had gained the aspect of self-confidence

which did not lack justification, and when a valiant knight talked to him so frankly, like a younger brother to an older and wiser one, it seemed to the lonely man who, of late, completely absorbed in the course of business, had held aloof from the sports, banquets, and diversions of the companions of his own age, that he had experienced something unusually pleasant. How tender and affectionate it sounded when Heinz alluded to the "little mother" at home! He, Wolff, on the contrary, could think only with a shade of bitterness of the weak woman to whom he owed his existence, and whom filial duty and earnest resolution alike commanded him to love, yet who made it so difficult for him to regard her with anything save anxiety or secret disapproval.

Perhaps the greatest advantage which the Swiss possessed over him was his manner of speaking of his family. How could it ever have entered Wolff Eysvogel's mind to call the tall, stiff woman, who was the feeble echo of her extravagant, arrogant mother, and who rustled towards him, even in the early morning, adorned with feathers and robed in rich brocade, his "dear little mother"?

Whoever spoke in the warm, loving tones that fell from the lips of Sir Heinz when he mentioned his relatives at home certainly could have no evil nature. No one need fear, though his usual mode of speech was so wanton, that he would trifle with a pure, innocent creature like Eva.

How Heinz had succeeded in winning so speedily the devout child, who was so averse to the idle coquetries of the companions of her own age, seemed incomprehensible, but he had no time to investigate now.

He must go, for he had long been burning with impatience to depart. The declaration of peace had taken effect only a few hours before, and the long waggon trains from Italy, of which he had told Els yesterday, were still delayed. The freight of spices and Levantine goods, Milan velvets, silks, and fine Florentine cloths, which they were bringing from the city of St. Mark, represented a large fortune. If it arrived in time, the profits would cover a great portion of the losses of the past two years, and the house would again be secure. If the worst should befall, how would his family submit to deprivation, perhaps even to penury? He had less fear of his grandmother's outbursts of wrath, but what would become of his feeble mother, who was as dependent as a child on her own mother? Yet he loved her; he felt deeply troubled by the thought of the severe humiliation which menaced her. His sister Isabella, too, was dear to him, in spite of her husband, the reckless Sir Seitz Siebenburg, in whose hands the gold paid from the coffers of the firm melted away, yet who was burdened with a mountain of debts.

Wolff had left orders at home to have his horse saddled. He had intended only to wave a greeting

to his Els and then ride to Neumarkt, or, if necessary, as far as Ingolstadt, to meet the wains.

A word of farewell to the new acquaintance, who was probably destined to be his brother-in-law, and then—— But just at that moment Heinz approached, and in reply to Wolff's low question: "And your lady's colour?" he answered joyously, pointing to the breast of his doublet: "I am carrying the messenger which promises to inform me, here on my heart. In the darkness it was silent; but the bright moonlight yonder will loose its tongue, unless the characters here are too unlike those of the prayer-book."

Drawing out Eva's little roll as he spoke, he approached a brightly lighted spot, pointed to the ribbon which fastened it, and exclaimed: "Doubtless she used her own colour to tie it. Blue, the pure, exquisite blue of her eyes! I thought so! Forget-me-not blue! The most beautiful of colours. You must pardon my impatience!"

He was about to begin to read the lines; but Wolff stopped him by pointing to the Ortlieb residence and to two drunken soldiers who came out of the tavern "For Thirsty Troopers," and walked, singing and staggering, up the opposite side of the street. Then, extending his hand to Heinz in farewell, he asked in a low tone, pointing to Biberli's figure just emerging from the shade, who was the messenger of love who served him so admirably.

"My shadow," replied the knight. "I loosed him from my heels and bade him stand there. But no offence, Herr Wolff Eysvogel; you'll make the queer fellow's acquaintance if, like myself, it would be agreeable to you to meet often, not only on iron chains, but on friendly terms with each other."

"Nothing would please me more," replied the other. "But how in the world could it happen that this well-guarded fortress surrendered to you after so short a resistance?"

"Heinz Schorlin rides swiftly," he interrupted; but Wolff exclaimed: "A swift ride awaits me, too, though of a different kind. When I return, I shall expect you to tell me how you won our 'little saint,' my sister-in-law Eva. The two beautiful Ortlieb 'Es' are *one* in the eyes of the townsfolk, so we also will be often named in the same breath, and shall do well to feel brotherly regard for each other. There shall be no fault on my part. Farewell, till we meet again, an' it please God *in* and not *outside* of our ladies' dwelling."

While speaking he clasped the knight's hand with so firm a grasp that it seemed as if he wished to force him to feel its pressure a long time, and hastened through the Frauenthor.

Heinz Schorlin gazed thoughtfully after him a short time, then beckoned to Biberli and, though the interval required for him to reach his master's side was very brief, it was sufficient for the bold

young lover, tortured by his ardent longing, to form another idea.

"Look yonder, Biberli!" he exclaimed. "The holy-water basin on the door-post, the escutcheon on the lintel above, the helmet, which would probably bear my weight. From there I can reach the window-sill with my hand, and once I have grasped it, I need only make one bold spring and, hurrah! I'm on it."

"May our patron saint have mercy on us!" cried the servant in horror. "You can get there as easily as you can spring on your two feet over two horses; but the coming down would certainly be a long distance lower than you would fancy—into the 'Hole,' as they call the prison here, and, moreover, though probably not until some time later, straight to the flames of hell; for you would have committed a great sin against a noble maiden rich in every virtue, who deemed you worthy of her love. And, besides, there are two Es. They occupy the same room, and the house is full of men and maid servants."

"Pedagogue!" said the knight, peevishly.

"Ay, that was Biberli's calling once," replied the servant, "and, for the sake of your lady mother at home, I wish I were one still, and you, Sir Heinz, would have to obey me like an obedient pupil. You are well aware that I rarely use her sacred name to influence you, but I do so now; and if you cherish her in your heart and do not

wish to swoop down on the innocent little dove like a destroying hawk, turn your back upon this place, where we have already lingered too long."

But this well-meant warning seemed to have had brief influence upon the person to whom it was addressed. Suddenly, with a joyous "There she is!" he snatched his cap from his head and waved a greeting to the window.

But in a few minutes he replaced it with a petulant gesture of the hand, saying sullenly: "Vanished! She dared not grant me a greeting, because she caught sight of you."

"Let us thank and praise a kind Providence for it," said his servitor with a sigh of relief, "since our Lord and Saviour assumed the form of a servant, that of a scarecrow, in which he has done admirable service, is far too noble and distinguished for Biberli."

As he spoke he walked on before the knight, and pointing to the tavern beside the Frauenthurm whose sign bore the words "For Thirsty Troopers," he added: "A green bush at the door. That means, unless the host is a rogue, a cask fresh broached. I wonder whether my tongue is cleaving to my palate from dread of your over-hasty courage, or whether it is really so terribly sultry here!"

"At any rate," Heinz interrupted, "a cup of wine will harm neither of us; for I myself feel how

oppressive the air is. Besides, it is light in the tavern, and who knows what the little note will tell me."

Meanwhile they passed the end of St. Klarengasse and went up to the green bush, which projected from the end of a pole far out into the street.

Soldiers in the pay of the city, and men-at-arms in the employ of the Emperor and the princes who had come to attend the Reichstag, were sitting over their wine in the tavern. From the ceiling hung two crossed iron triangles, forming a six-pointed star. The tallow candles burning low in their sockets, which it contained, and some pitch-pans in the corners, diffused but a dim light through the long apartment.

Master and man found an empty table apart from the other guests, in a niche midway down the rear wall.

Without heeding the brawling and swearing, the rude songs and disorderly shouts, the drumming of clenched fists upon the oak tables, the wild laughter of drunken soldiers, the giggling and screeching of bar-maids, and the scolding and imperious commands of the host, they proved that the green bush had not lied, for the wine really did come from a freshly opened cask just brought up from the cellar. But as the niche was illumined only by the tiny oil lamp burning beneath the image of the Virgin, bedizened with flowers and gold and silver

tinsel, fastened against the wall, Biberli asked the weary bar-maid for a brighter light.

When the girl withdrew he sighed heavily, saying: "O my lord, if you only knew! Even now, when we are again among men and the wine has refreshed me, I feel as if rats were gnawing at my soul. Conscience, my lord—conscience!"

"You, too, are usually quite ready to play the elf in the rose-garden of love," replied Heinz gaily. "Moreover, I shall soon need a T and an S embroidered on my own doublet, for—— Why don't they bring the light? Another cup of wine, the note, and then with renewed vigour we'll go back again."

"For God's sake," interrupted Biberli, "do not speak, do not even think, of the bold deed you suggested! Doesn't it seem like a miracle that not one of the many Ortlieb and Montfort servants crossed your path? Even such a child of good luck as yourself can scarcely expect a second one the same evening. And if there is not, and you go back under the window, you will be recognised, perhaps even seized, and then—O my lord, consider this!—then you will bear throughout your life the reproach of having brought shame and bitter sorrow upon a maiden whom you yourself know is lovely, devout, and pure. And I, too, who serve you loyally in your lady mother's behalf, as well as the poor maid who, to pleasure me, interceded for you with her mistress, will run the risk of our

lives if you are caught climbing into the window or committing any similar offence; for in this city they are prompt with the stocks, the stone collar, the rack, and the tearing of the tongue from the mouth whenever any one is detected playing the part of go-between in affairs of love."

"Usually, old fellow," replied Heinz in a tone of faint reproach, "we considered it a matter of course that, though we took the most daring risks in such things, we were certain not to be caught. Yet, to be frank, some incomprehensible burden weighs upon my soul. My feelings are confused and strange. I would rather tear the crown from the head of yonder image of the Virgin than do aught to this sweet innocence for which she could not thank me."

Here he paused, for the bar-maid brought a two-branched candelabrum, in which burned two tallow candles.

Heinz instantly opened the little roll.

How delicate were the characters it contained! His heart's beloved had committed them to the paper with her own hand, and the knight's blood surged hotly through his veins as he gazed at them. It seemed as though he held in his hand a portion of herself and, obeying a hasty impulse, he kissed the letter.

Then he eagerly began to study the writing; he had never seen anything so delicate and peculiar in form.

The deciphering of the first lines in which, it is true, she called him a godly knight, but also informed him that his boldness had angered her, caused him much difficulty, and Biberli was often obliged to help.

Would she have rebuffed him so ungraciously with her lips as with the pen? Was it possible that, on account of a request which every lover ventured to address to his lady, she would withdraw the favour which rendered him so happy? Oh, yes, for innocence is delicate and sensitive. She ought to have repelled him thus. He was secretly rejoiced to see the sweet modesty which had so charmed him again proved. He must know what the rest of the letter contained, and the ex-schoolmaster was at hand to give the information at once.

True, the hastily written sentences presented some difficulties even for Biberli, but after glancing through the whole letter, he exclaimed with a satisfied smile: "Just as I expected! At the first look one might think that the devout little lady was wholly unlike the rest of her sex, but on examining more closely she proves as much like any other beautiful girl as two peas. With good reason and prudent caution she forbids the languishing knight to remain beneath her window, yet she will risk a pleasant little interview in some safe nook. That is wise for so young a girl, and at the same time natural and womanly. I don't know why you

knit your brows. Since the first Eve came from a crooked rib, all her daughters prefer devious ways. But first hear what she writes." Then, without heeding his master's gloomy face, he began to read the note aloud.

Heinz listened intently, and after he had heard that the lady of his love did not desire to meet him alone, but only under the protection of a friend and her saint, when he heard her name her colour, it is true, but also express the expectation that, as a godly knight, he would fight for her sake in honour of the gracious Virgin, his face brightened.

During Biberli's scoffing comments he had felt as if a tempest had hurled her pure image in the dust. But now that he knew what she asked of him, it returned as a matter of course to its old place and, with a sigh of relief, he felt that he need not be ashamed of the emotions which this wonderful young creature had awakened in his soul. She had opened her pious heart like a trusting sister to an older brother, and what he had seen there was something unusual—things which had appeared sacred to him even when a child. Since he took leave of her in the ball-room he had felt as though Heaven had loaned this, its darling, to earth for but a brief space, and her brocade robe must conceal angel wings. Should it surprise him that the pure innocence which filled her whole being was expressed also in her letter, if she summoned him, not to idle love-dalliance but to a

covenant of souls, a mutual conflict for what was highest and most sacred? Such a thing was incomprehensible to Biberli; but notwithstanding her letter—nay, even on its account—he longed still more ardently to lead her home to his mother and see her receive the blessing of the woman whom he so deeply honoured.

He had Eva's letter read for the second and the third time. But when Biberli paused, and in a few brief sentences cast fresh doubts upon the writer, Heinz angrily stopped him. "The longing of the godly heart of a pure maiden—mark this well—has naught in common with that diabolical delight in secret love-dalliance for which others yearn. My wish to force my way to her was sinful, and it was punished severely enough, for during your rude scoffs I felt as though you had set fire to the house over my head. But from this I perceive in what a sacred, inviolable spot her image had found a place. True, it is denied you to follow the lofty, heavenward aspiration of a pure soul——"

"O my lord," interrupted the servitor with hands uplifted in defence, "who besought you not to measure this innocent daughter of a decorous household, who was scarcely beyond childhood, by the standard you applied to others? Who entreated you to spare her fair fame? And if you deem the stuff of which the servant is made too coarse to understand what moves so pure a soul,

you do Biberli injustice, for, by my patron saint, though duty commanded me to interpose doubts and scruples between you and a passion from which could scarcely spring aught that would bring joy to your mother's heart I, too, asked myself the question why, in these days, a devout maiden should not long to try her skill in conversion upon a valiant knight who served her. Ever since St. Francis of Assisi appeared in Italy, barefooted monks and grey-robed nuns, who follow him, Franciscans and Sisters of St. Clare stream hither as water flows into a mill-race when the sluice-gates are opened. With what edification we, too, listened to the old Minorite whom we picked up by the wayside, at the tavern where we usually found pleasure in nothing but drinking, gambling, shouting, and singing! Besides, I know from my sweetheart with what exemplary devotion the lovely Eva follows St. Clare."

"Who is now and will remain my patron saint also, old Biber," interrupted Heinz with joyful emotion, as he laid his hand gratefully on his follower's shoulder; then rising and beckoning to the bar-maid, added: "The stuff of which you are made, old comrade, is inferior to no man's. Only now and then the pedagogue plays you a trick. Had you uttered your real opinion in the first place, the wine would have tasted better to us both. Let Eva try the work of conversion on me! What, save my lady's love, is more to me than our

holy faith? It must indeed be a delight to take the field for the Church and against her foes!"

While speaking, he paid the reckoning and went out with Biberli.

The moon was now pouring her silver beams, with full radiance, over the quiet street, the linden in front of the Ortlieb house, and its lofty gable roof. Only a single room in the spacious mansion was still lighted, the bow-windowed one occupied by the two sisters.

Heinz, without heeding Biberli's renewed protest, looked upward, silently imploring Eva's pardon for having misjudged her even a moment. His gaze rested devoutly on the open window, behind which a curtain was stirring. Was it the night breeze that almost imperceptibly raised and lowered it, or was her own dear self concealed behind it?

Just at that moment he suddenly felt his servant's hand on his arm, and as he followed his horror-stricken gaze, a chill ran through his own veins. From the heavy door of the house, which stood half open, a white-robed figure emerged with the solemn, noiseless footfall of a ghost, and advanced across the courtyard towards him.

Was it a restless spirit risen from its grave at the midnight hour, which must be close at hand?

Through his brain, like a flash of lightning, darted the thought that Eva had spoken to him of

her invalid mother. Had she died? Was her wandering soul approaching him to drive him from the threshold of the house which hid her endangered child?

But no!

The figure had stopped before the door and now, raising its head, gazed with wide eyes upward at the moon, and—he was not mistaken—it was no spectre of darkness; it was she for whom every pulse of his heart throbbed—Eva!

No human creature had ever seemed to him so divinely fair as she in her long white night-robe, over which fell the thick waves of her light hair. The horror which had seized him yielded to the most ardent yearning. Pressing his hand upon his throbbing heart, he watched her every movement. He longed to go forward to meet her, yet a supernatural spell seemed to paralyse his energy. He would sooner have dared clasp in his arms the image of a beautiful Madonna than this embodiment of pure, helpless, gracious innocence.

Now she herself drew nearer, but he felt as if his will was broken, and with timid awe he drew back one step, and then another, till the chain stopped him.

Just at that moment she paused, stretched out her white arm with a beckoning gesture, and again turned towards the house, Heinz following because he could not help it, her sign drew him after her with magnetic power.

Now Eva entered the dimly lighted corridor, and again her uplifted hand seemed to invite him to follow. Then—the impetuous throbbing of his heart almost stifled him—she set her little white foot on the first step of the stairs and led the way up to the first landing, where she paused, lifting her face to the open window, through which the moon-beams streamed into the hall, flooding her head, her figure, and every surrounding object with their soft light.

Heinz followed step by step. It seemed as if the wild surges of a sea were roaring in his ears, and glittering sparks were dancing before his yearning, watchful eyes.

How he loved her! How intense was the longing which drew him after her! And yet another emotion stirred in his heart with still greater power—grief, sincere grief, which pierced his inmost soul, that she could have beckoned to him, permitted him to follow her, granted him what he would never have ventured to ask. Nay, when he set his foot on the first step, it seemed as if the temple which contained his holiest treasure fell crashing around him, and an inner voice cried loudly: "Away, away from here! Would you exchange the purest and loftiest things for what to-morrow will fill you with grief and loathing?" it continued to admonish. "You will relinquish what is dearest and most sacred to secure what is ready to rush into your arms on all the high-roads.

Hence, hence, you poor, deluded mortal, ere it is too late!"

But even had he known it was the fair fiend Venus herself moving before him under the guise of Eva, the spell of her unutterable beauty would have constrained him to follow her, though the goal were the Hörselberg, death, and hell.

On the second landing she again stood still and, leaning against a pillar, raised her arms and extended them towards the moon, in whose silvery light they gleamed like marble. Heinz saw her lips move, heard his own name fall from them, and all self-control vanished.

"Eva!" he cried with passionate fervor, holding out his arms to clasp her; but, ere he even touched her, a shriek of despairing anguish echoed loudly back from the walls.

The sound of her own name had broken the threads with which the mysterious power of the moonlight had drawn her from her couch, down through the house, out of doors, and again back to the stairs.

Sleep vanished with the dream which she had shared with him and, shuddering, she perceived where she was, saw the knight before her, became conscious that she had left her chamber in her night-robe, with disordered hair .and bare feet; and, frantic with horror at the thought of the resistless might with which a mysterious force constrained her to obey it against her own will, deeply

wounded by the painful feeling that she had been led so far across the bounds of maidenly modesty, hurt and angered by the boldness of the man before her, who had dared to follow her into her parents' house, she again raised her voice, this time to call her from whom she was accustomed to seek and find help in every situation in life.

"Els! Els!" rang up the stairs; and the next moment Els, who had already heard Eva's first scream, sprang down the few steps to her sister's side.

One glance at the trembling girl in her night-robe, and at the moonlight which still bathed her in its rays, told Els what had drawn Eva to the stairs.

The knight must have slipped into the house and found her there. She knew him and, before Heinz had time to collect his thoughts, she said soothingly to her sister, who threw her arms around her as though seeking protection: "Go up to your room, child!—Help her, Kätterle. I'll come directly."

While Eva, leaning on the maid's arm, mounted the stairs with trembling knees, Els turned to the Swiss and said in a grave, resolute tone: "If you are worthy of your escutcheon, Sir Knight, you will not now fly like a coward from this house, across whose threshold you stole with shameful insolence, but await me here until I return. You shall not be detained long. But, to guard your-

self and another from misinterpretation, you must hear me."

Heinz nodded assent in silence, as if still under the spell of what he had recently experienced. But, ere he reached the entry below, Martsche, the old housekeeper, and Endres, the aged head packer, came towards him, just as they had risen from their beds, the former with a petticoat flung round her shoulders, the latter wrapped in a horse-blanket.

Eva's shriek had waked both, but Els enjoined silence on everyone and, after telling them to go back to bed, said briefly that Eva in her somnambulism had this time gone out into the street and been brought back by the knight. Finally, she again said to Heinz, "Presently!" and then went to her sister.

CHAPTER IX.

When Biberli bade farewell to his sweetheart, who gave him Eva's little note, he had arranged to meet her again in an hour or, if his duties detained him longer, in two; but after the "true and steadfast" fellow left her, her heart throbbed more and more anxiously, for the wrong she had done in acting as messenger between the young daughter of her employers and a stranger knight was indeed hard to forgive.

Instead of waiting in the kitchen or entry for her lover's return, as she had intended, she had gone to the image of the Virgin at the gate of the Convent of St. Clare, before which she had often found consolation, especially when homesick yearning for the mountains of her native Switzerland pressed upon her too sorely. This time also it had been gracious to her, for after she had prayed very devoutly and vowed to give a candle to the Mother of God, as well as to St. Clare, she fancied that the image smiled upon her and promised that she should go unpunished.

On her return the knight had just followed Eva

into the house, and Biberli pursued his master as far as the stairs. Here Kätterle met her lover, but, when she learned what was occurring, she became greatly enraged and incensed by the base interpretation which the servant placed upon Eva's going out into the street and, terrified by the danger into which the knight threatened to plunge them all, she forgot the patience and submission she was accustomed to show the true and steadfast Biberli. But—resolved to protect her young mistress from the presumptuous knight—scarcely had she angrily cried shame upon her lover for this base suspicion, protesting that Eva had never gone to seek a knight but, as she had often done on bright moonlight nights, walked in her sleep down the stairs and out of doors, when the young girl's shriek of terror summoned her to her aid.

Biberli looked after her sullenly, meanwhile execrating bitterly enough the wild love which had robbed his master of reason and threatened to hurl him, Biberli, and even the innocent Kätterle, whose brave defence of her mistress had especially pleased him, into serious misfortune.

When old Endres appeared he had slipped behind a wall formed of bales heaped one above another, and did not stir until the entry was quiet again.

To his amazement he had then found his master standing beside the door of the house, but his question—which, it is true, was not wholly devoid

of a shade of sarcasm—whether the knight was waiting for the return of his sleep-walking sweetheart, was so harshly rebuffed that he deemed it advisable to keep silence for a time.

Though Heinz Schorlin had perceived that he had followed an unconscious somnambulist, he was not yet capable of calmly reflecting upon what had occurred or of regarding the future with prudence. He knew one thing only: the fear was idle that the lovely creature whose image, surrounded by a halo of light, still hovered before him like a vision from a higher, more beautiful world, was an unworthy person who, with a face of angelic innocence, transgressed the laws of custom and modesty. Her shriek of terror, her horror at seeing him, and the cry for help which had brought her sister to her aid and roused the servants from their sleep, gave him the right to esteem her as highly as ever; and this conviction fanned into such a blaze the feeling of happiness which love had awakened and his foolish distrust had already begun to stifle, that he was firmly resolved, cost what it might, to make Eva his own.

After he had reached this determination he began to reflect more quietly. What cared he for liberty and a rapid advance in the career upon which he had entered, if only his future life was beautified by her love!

If he were required to woo her in the usual form, he would do so. And what a charming yet

resolute creature was the other E, who, in her anxiety about her sister, had crossed his path with such grave, firm dignity! She was Wolff Eysvogel's betrothed bride, and it seemed to him a very pleasant thing to call the young man, whom he had so quickly learned to esteem, his brother-in-law.

If the father refused his daughter to him, he would leave Nuremberg and ride to the Rhine, where Hartmann, the Emperor Rudolph's son, whom he loved like a younger brother, was now living. Heinz had instructed the lad of eighteen in the use of the lance and the sword, and Hartmann had sent him word the day before that the Rhine was beautiful, but without him he but half enjoyed even the pleasantest things. He needed him. Hundreds of other knights and squires could break in the new horses for the Emperor and the young Bohemian princess, though perhaps not quite so skilfully. Hartmann would understand him and persuade his imperial father to aid him in his suit. The warm-hearted youth could not bear to see him sorrowful, and without Eva there was no longer joy or happiness.

He was roused from these thoughts and dreams by his own name called in a low tone.

Kätterle had gone with Eva to the chamber, whither the older sister followed them. Tenderly embracing the weeping girl, she had kissed her wet eyes and whispered in an agitated voice, with which, however, blended a great deal of affection-

ate mischief: "The wolf who forced his way into the house does not seem quite so harmless as mine, whom I have succeeded in taming very tolerably. Go to mother now, darling. I'll be back directly."

"What do you intend to do?" asked Eva timidly, still unable, under the influence of her strange experiences, to regain her self-control.

"To look around the house," replied her sister, beckoning to Kätterle to accompany her.

In the entry she questioned the maid with stern decision, and the trembling girl owned, amid her tears, that Eva had sent a little note to the knight in reply to his request that she would name her colour, and whatever else her anxious mistress desired hastily to learn.

After a threatening "We will discuss your outrageous conduct later," Els hurried down-stairs, and found in the entry the man whose pleasure in the pursuit of the innocent child whom she protected she meant to spoil. But though she expressed her indignation to the knight with the utmost harshness, he besought a hearing with so much respect and in such seemly words, that she requested him, in a gentler tone, to speak freely. But scarcely had he begun to relate how Eva, at the ball, had filled his heart with the purest love, when the trampling of horses' hoofs, which had come nearer and nearer to the house, suddenly ceased, and Biberli, who had gone into the court-

yard, came hurrying back, exclaiming in a tone of warning, "The von Montforts!"

At the same moment two men-servants threw back both leaves of the door, torchlight mingled with the moonbeams in the courtyard, and the next instant a goodly number of knights and gentlemen entered the hall.

Biberli was not mistaken. The von Montforts had returned home, instead of spending the night at Kadolzburg, and neither Els nor the Swiss had the time or disposition to seek concealment.

The intruders were preceded by men-servants, whose torches lighted the long, lofty storehouse brilliantly. It seemed to Els as if her heart stopped beating and she felt her cheeks blanch.

Here she beheld Count von Montfort's bronzed face, the countenance of a sportsman and reveller; yonder the frank, handsome features of the young Burgrave, Eitelfritz von Zollern, framed by the hood of the Knights of St. John, drawn up during the night-ride; there the pale, noble visage of the quiet knight Boemund Altrosen, far famed for his prowess with lance and sword; beyond, the scarred, martial countenance of Count Casper Schlick, set in a mass of tangled brown locks; and then the watery, blue eyes of Sir Seitz Siebenburg, the husband of her future sister-in-law Isabella.

They had pressed in, talking eagerly, laughing, and rejoicing that the wild night ride proposed by Cordula von Montfort, which had led over dark

forest paths, lighted only by a stray moonbeam, and often across fields and ditches and through streams, had ended without mischance to man or beast.

Now they all crowded around the countess, Seitz Siebenburg bending towards her with such zeal that the ends of his huge mustache brushed the plumes in her cap, and Boemund Altrosen, who had just been gazing into the flushed face of the daring girl with the warm joy of true love, cast a look of menace at him.

Els, too, greatly disliked "the Mustache," as her future brother-in-law was called because the huge ornament on his upper lip made him conspicuous among the beardless knights. She was aware that he returned the feeling, and had left no means untried to incite Wolff Eysvogel's parents to oppose his betrothal. Now he was one of the first to notice her and, after whispering with a malicious smile to the countess and those nearest to him, he looked at her so malevolently that she could easily guess what interpretation he was trying to put upon her nocturnal meeting with the Swiss in the eyes of his companions.

Her cheeks flamed with wrath, and like a flash of lightning came the thought of the pleasure it would afford this wanton company, whose greatest delight was to gloat over the errors of their neighbours, if the knight who had brought her into this suspicious situation, or she herself, should confess

that not she, but the devout Eva, had attracted Heinz hither. What a satisfaction it would be to this reckless throng to tell such a tale of a young girl of whom the Burgravine von Zollern had said the evening before to their Uncle Pfinzing, that purity and piety had chosen Eva's lovely face for a mirror!

What if Heinz Schorlin, to save her, Els, from evil report, should confess that she was here only to rebuke his insolent intrusion into a decorous household?

This must be prevented, and Heinz seemed to understand her; for after their eyes had met, his glance of helpless enquiry told her that he would leave her to find an escape from this labyrinth.

The merry party, who now perceived that they had interrupted the nocturnal tryst of lovers, did not instantly know what to do and, as one looked enquiringly at another, an embarrassed silence followed their noisy jollity.

But the hush did not last long, and its interruption at first seemed to Els to bode the worst result; it was a peal of gay, reckless laughter, ringing from the lips of the very Cordula von Montfort, into whose eyes, as the only one of her own sex who was present, Els had just gazed with a look imploring aid.

Had Eva's aversion to the countess been justified, and was she about to take advantage of her unpleasant position to jeer at her?

Had the two quarrelled at the ball the night before, and did Cordula now perceive an opportunity to punish the younger sister by the humiliation of the older one?

Yet her laugh sounded by no means spiteful—rather, very gay and natural. The pleasant grey eyes sparkled with the most genuine mirth, and she clapped her little hands so joyously that the falcon's chain on the gauntlet of her riding glove rattled.

And what was this?

No one looks at a person whom one desires to wound with an expression of such cheerful encouragement as the look with which Cordula now gazed at Els and Heinz Schorlin, who stood by her side. True, they were at first extremely perplexed by the words she now shouted to those around her in a tone of loud exultation, as though announcing a victory; but from the beginning they felt that there was no evil purpose in them. Soon they even caught the real meaning of the countess's statement, and Els was ashamed of having feared any injury from the girl whose defender she had always been.

"Won, Sir Knight—cleverly won!" was her first sentence to Heinz.

Then, turning to Els, she asked with no less animation: "And you, my fair maid and very strict housemate, who has won the wager now? Do you still believe it is an inconceivable thought

that the modest daughter of a decorous Nuremberg race, entitled to enter the lists of a tourney, would grant a young knight a midnight meeting?" And addressing her companions, she continued, in an explanatory yet still playful tone: "She was ready to wager the beautiful brown locks which she now hides modestly under a kerchief, and even her betrothed lover's ring. It should be mine if I succeeded in leading her to commit such an abominable deed. But I was content, if I won the wager, with a smaller forfeit; yet now that I have gained it, Jungfrau Ortlieb, you must pay!"

The whole company listened in astonishment to this speech, which no one understood, but the countess, nodding mischievously to her nearest neighbours, went on:

"How bewildered you all look! It might tempt me to satisfy your curiosity less speedily, but, after the delightful entertainment you gave us, my Lord Burgrave, one becomes merciful. So you shall hear how I, as wise as the serpent, craftily forced this haughty knight"—she tapped Heinz Schorlin's arm with her riding whip—"and you, too, Jungfrau Ortlieb, whose pardon I now entreat, to help me win the bet. No offence, noble sirs! But this bet was what compelled me to drag you all from Kadolzburg and its charms so early, and induce you to attend me on the reckless ride through the moonlit night. Now accept the thanks of a lady whose heart is grateful; for your obe-

dience helped me win the wager. Look yonder at my handsome, submissive knight, Sir Heinz Schorlin, so rich in every virtue. I commanded him, on pain of my anger, to meet me at midnight at the entrance of our quarters—that is, the entry of the Ortlieb mansion; and to this modest and happy betrothed bride (may she pardon the madcap!) I represented how it troubled me and wounded my timid delicacy to enter so late at night, accompanied only by gentlemen, the house which so hospitably sheltered us, and go to my sleeping room, though I should not fear the Sultan and his mamelukes, if with this in my hand"—she motioned to her riding whip—"and my dear father at my side, I stood on my own feet which, though by no means small, are well-shod and resolute. Yet, as we are apt to measure others by our own standard, the timid, decorous girl believed me, and poor Cordula, who indeed brought only her maids and no female guardian, and therefore must dispense with being received on her return by a lady capable of commanding respect, did not appeal in vain to the charitable feelings of her beautiful housemate. She promised faithfully to come down into the entry, when the horses approached, to receive the poor lamb, surrounded by lynxes, wild-cats, foxes, and wolves, and lead it into the safe fold—if one can call this stately house by such a name. Both Sir Heinz Schorlin and Jungfrau Elizabeth Ortlieb kept their word and joined each other here—to

their extreme amazement, I should suppose, as to my knowledge they never met before—to receive me, and thus had an interview which, however loudly they may contradict it, I call a nocturnal meeting. But my wager, fair child, is won, and to-morrow you will deliver to me the exquisite carved ivory casket, while I shall keep my bracelet."

Here she paused, paying no heed to the merry threats, exclamations of amazement, and laughter of her companions.

But while her father, striking his broad chest, cried again and again, with rapturous delight, "A paragon of a woman!" and Seitz Siebenburg, in bitter disappointment, whispered, "The fourteen saintly helpers in time of need might learn from you how to draw from the clamps what is not worth rescue and probably despaired of escape," she was trying to give time to recover more composure her young hostess, to whom she was sincerely attached, and who, she felt sure, could have met Heinz Schorlin, who perhaps had come hither on her own account, only by some cruel chance. So she added in a quieter tone: "And now, Jungfrau Ortlieb, in sober earnest I will ask your protection and guidance through the dark house, and meanwhile you shall tell me how Sir Heinz greeted you and what passed between you, either good or bad, during the time of waiting."

Els summoned up her courage and answered loud enough to be heard by all present: "We were

speaking of you, Countess Cordula, and the knight said——"

"I ventured to remark, Countess," said Heinz, interrupting the new ally, "that though you might understand how to show a poor knight his folly, no kinder heart than yours throbbed under any bodice in Switzerland, Swabia, or France."

Cordula struck him lightly on the shoulder with her riding whip, saying with a laugh: "Who permits you to peep under women's bodices through so wide a tract of country, you scamp? Had I been in Jungfrau Ortlieb's place I should have punished your entry into a respectable house——"

"Oh, my dear Countess," Heinz interrupted, and his words bore so distinctly the stamp of truth and actual experience that even Sir Seitz Siebenburg was puzzled, "though I am always disposed to be grateful to you, I cannot feel a sense of obligation for this lady's reception of me, even to the most gracious benefactress. For, by my patron saint, she forbade me the house as if I were a thief and a burglar."

"And she was right!" exclaimed the countess. "I would have treated you still more harshly. Only you would have spared yourself many a sharp word had you confessed at once that it was I who summoned you here. I'll talk with you tomorrow, and—— Am I not right, Jungfrau Els—you won't make him suffer for losing the wager,

but exercise your domestic authority after a more gentle fashion?"

While speaking, she looked at Els with a glance so full of meaning that the young girl's cheeks crimsoned, and the longing to put an end to this deceitful game became almost uncontrollable. The thought of Eva alone sealed her lips.

CHAPTER X.

One person only besides Sir Seitz Siebenburg had not been deceived—the young knight Boemund Altrosen, whose love for Cordula was genuine, and who, by its unerring instinct, felt that she had invented her tale and for a purpose which did honour to her kindness of heart. So his calm black eyes rested upon the woman he loved with proud delight, while Seitz Siebenburg twisted his mustache fiercely. Not a look or movement of either of the two girls had escaped his notice, and Cordula's bold interference in behalf of the reckless Swiss knight, who now seemed to have ensnared his future sister-in-law also, increased the envy and jealousy which tortured him until he was forced to exert the utmost self-restraint in order not to tell the countess to her face that he, at least, was far from being deceived by such a fable. Yet he succeeded in controlling himself. But as he forced his lips to silence he gazed with the most open scorn at the bales of merchandise heaped around him. He would show the others that, though the husband of a merchant's daughter, he retained the prejudices of his knightly rank.

But no one heeded the disagreeable fellow, who had no intimate friends in the group. Most of the company were pressing round Heinz Schorlin with jests and questions, but bluff Count von Montfort warmly clasped Els's hand, while he apologised for the bold jest of his young daughter who, in spite of her recklessness, meant kindly.

Nothing could have been more unwelcome to a girl in so unpleasant a situation than this delay. She longed most ardently to get away but, ere she succeeded in escaping from the friendly old noble, two gentlemen hastily entered the brightly lighted entry, at sight of whom her heart seemed to stop beating.

The old count, who noticed her blanched face, released her, asking sympathisingly what troubled her, but Els did not hear him.

When she felt him loose her hand she would fain have fled up the stairs to her mother and sister, to avoid the discussions which must now follow. But she knew into what violent outbursts of sudden anger her usually prudent father could be hurried if there was no one at hand to warn him.

There he stood in the doorway, his stern, gloomy expression forming a strange contrast to the merry party who had entered in such a jovial mood.

His companion, Herr Casper Eysvogel, had already noticed his future daughter-in-law, recognised her by an amazed shrug of the shoulders which was anything but a friendly greeting, and

now eyed the excited revellers with a look as grave and repellent as that of the owner of the house.

Herr Casper's unusual height permitted him to gaze over the heads of the party though, with the exception of Count von Montfort, they were all tall, nay, remarkably tall men, and the delicacy of his clear-cut, pallid, beardless face had never seemed to Els handsomer or more sinister. True, he was the father of her Wolff, but the son resembled this cold-hearted man only in his unusual stature, and a chill ran through her veins as she felt the stately old merchant's blue eyes, still keen and glittering, rest upon her.

On the day of her betrothal she had rushed into his arms with a warm and grateful heart, and he had kissed her, as custom dictated; but it was done in a strange way—his thin, well-cut lips had barely brushed her brow. Then he stepped back and turned to his wife with the low command, "It is your turn now, Rosalinde." Her future mother-in-law rose quickly, and doubtless intended to embrace her affectionately, but a loud cough from her own mother seemed to check her, for ere she opened her arms to Els she turned to her and excused her act by the words, "He wishes it." Yet Els was finally clasped in Frau Rosalinde's arms and kissed more warmly than—from what had previously occurred—she had expected.

Wolff's grandmother, old Countess Rotterbach, who rarely left the huge gilt armchair in her

daughter's sitting-room, had watched the whole scene with a scornful smile; then, thrusting her prominent chin still farther forward, she said to her daughter, loud enough for Els to hear, "This into the bargain?"

All these things returned to the young girl's memory as she gazed at the cold, statuesque face of her lover's father. It seemed as if he held his tall, noble figure more haughtily erect than usual, and that his plain dark garments were of richer material and more faultless cut than ever; nay, she even fancied that, like the lion, which crouches and strains every muscle ere it springs upon its victim, he was summoning all his pride and sternness to crush her.

Els was innocent; nay, the motive which had brought her here to defend her sister could not fail to be approved by every well-disposed person, and certainly not last by her father, and it would have suited her truthful nature to contradict openly Countess Cordula's friendly falsehood had not her dread of fatally exposing Eva imposed silence.

How her father's cheeks glowed already! With increasing anxiety, she attributed it to the indignation which overpowered him, yet he was only heated by the haste with which, accompanied by his future son-in-law's father, he had rushed here from the Frauenthor as fast as his feet would carry him.

Casper Eysvogel had also attended the Vorchtel

entertainment and accompanied Ernst Ortlieb into the street to discuss some business matters.

He intended to persuade him to advance the capital for which he had just vainly asked Herr Vorchtel. He stood in most urgent need for the next few days of this great sum, of which his son and business partner must have no knowledge, and at first Wolff Eysvogel's future father-in-law saw no reason to refuse. But Herr Ernst was a cautious man, and when his companion imposed the condition that his son should be kept in ignorance of the loan, he was puzzled. He wished to learn why the business partner should not know what must be recorded in the books of the house; but Casper Eysvogel needed this capital to silence the Jew Pfefferkorn, from whom he had secretly borrowed large sums to conceal the heavy losses sustained in Venice the year before at the gaming table.

At first courteously, then with rising anger, he evaded the questions of the business man, and his manner of doing so, with the little contradictions in which the arrogant man, unaccustomed to falsehood, involved himself, showed Herr Ernst that all was not as it should be.

By the time they reached the Frauenthor, he had told Casper Eysvogel positively that he would not fulfil the request until Wolff was informed of the matter.

Then the sorely pressed man perceived that

nothing but a frank confession could lead him to his goal. But what an advantage it would give his companion, what a humiliation it would impose upon himself! He could not force his lips to utter it, but resolved to venture a last essay by appealing to the father, instead of to the business man; and therefore, with the haughty, condescending manner natural to him, he asked Herr Ernst, as if it were his final word, whether he had considered that his refusal of a request, which twenty other men would deem it an honour to fulfil, might give their relations a form very undesirable both to his daughter and himself?

"No, I did not suppose that a necessity," replied his companion firmly, and then added in an irritated tone: "But if you need the loan so much that you require for your son a father-in-law who will advance it to you more readily, why, then, Herr Casper——"

Here he paused abruptly. A flood of light streamed into the street from the doorway of the Ortlieb house. It must be a fire, and with the startled cry, "St. Florian aid us! my entry is burning!" he rushed forward with his companion to the endangered house so quickly that the torch-bearers, who even in this bright night did good service in the narrow streets, whose lofty houses barred out the moonlight, could scarcely follow.

Thus Herr Ernst, far more anxious about his invalid, helpless wife than his imperilled wares,

soon reached his own door. His companion crossed the threshold close behind him, sullen, deeply incensed, and determined to order his son to choose between his love and favour and the daughter of this unfriendly man, whom only a sudden accident had prevented from breaking the betrothal.

The sight of so many torches blazing here was an exasperating spectacle to Ernst Ortlieb, who with wise caution and love of order insisted that nothing but lanterns should be used to light his house, which contained inflammable wares of great value; but other things disturbed his composure, already wavering, to an even greater degree.

What was his Els doing at this hour among these gentlemen, all of whom were strangers?

Without heeding them or the countess, he was hastening towards her to obtain a solution of this enigma, but the young Burgrave Eitelfritz von Zollern, the Knight of Altrosen, Cordula von Montfort, and others barred his way by greeting him and eagerly entreating him to pardon their intrusion at so late an hour.

Having no alternative, he curtly assented, and was somewhat soothed as he saw old Count von Montfort, who was still standing beside Els, engaged in an animated conversation with her. His daughter's presence was probably due to that of the guests quartered in his home, especially Cordula, whom, since she disturbed the peace of his quiet household night after night, he regarded as

the personification of restlessness and reckless freedom. He would have preferred to pass her unnoticed, but she had clung to his arm and was trying, with coaxing graciousness, to soften his indignation by gaily relating how she had come here and what had detained her and her companions. But Ernst Ortlieb, who would usually have been very susceptible to such an advance from a young and aristocratic lady, could not now succeed in smoothing his brow. In his excitement he was not even able to grasp the meaning of the story she related merrily, though with well-feigned contrition. While listening to her with one ear, he was straining the other to catch what Sir Seitz Siebenburg was saying to his father-in-law, Casper Eysvogel.

He gathered from Countess Cordula's account that she had succeeded in playing some bold prank in connection with Els and the Swiss knight Heinz Schorlin, and the words "the Mustache" was whispering to his father-in-law—the direction of his glance betrayed it—also referred to Els and the Swiss. But the less Herr Ernst heard of this conversation the more painfully it excited his already perturbed spirit.

Suddenly his pleasant features, which, on account of the lady at his side, he had hitherto forced to wear a gracious aspect, assumed an expression which filled the reckless countess with grave anxiety, and urged the terrified Els, who

had not turned her eyes from him, to a hasty resolution. That was her father's look when on the point of an outbreak of fury, and at this hour, surrounded by these people, he must not allow himself to yield to rage; he must maintain a tolerable degree of composure.

Without heeding the young Burgrave Eitelfritz or Sir Boemund Altrosen, who were just approaching her, she forced her way nearer to her father. He still maintained his self-control, but already the veins on his brow had swollen and his short figure was rigidly erect. The cause of his excitement—she had noticed it—was some word uttered by Seitz Siebenburg. Her father was the only person who had understood it, but she was not mistaken in the conjecture that it referred to her and the Swiss knight, and she believed it to be base and spiteful.

In fact, after his father-in-law had told him that Ernst Ortlieb thought his house was on fire, "the Mustache," in reply to Herr Casper's enquiry how his son's betrothed bride happened to be there, answered scornfully: "Els? She did not hasten hither, like the old man, to put the fire out, but because one flame was not enough for her. Wolff must know it to-morrow. By day the slender little flame of honourable betrothed love flickers for him; by night it blazes more brightly for yonder Swiss scoundrel. And the young lady chooses for the scene of this toying with fire the easily ignited warehouse of her own father!"

"I will secure mine against such risks," Casper Eysvogel answered; then, casting a contemptuous glance at Els and a wrathful one at the Swiss knight, he added with angry resolution: "It is not yet too late. So long as I am myself no one shall bring peril and disgrace upon my house and my son."

Then Herr Ernst had suddenly become aware of the suspicion with which his beautiful, brave, self-sacrificing child was regarded. Pale as death, he struggled for composure, and when his eyes met the imploring gaze of the basely defamed girl, he said to himself that he must maintain his self-control in order not to afford the frivolous revellers who surrounded him an entertaining spectacle.

Wolff was dear to him, but before he would have led his Els to the house where the miserable "Mustache" lived, and whose head was the cold-hearted, gloomy man whose words had just struck him like a poisoned arrow, he, whom the Lord had bereft of his beloved, gallant son, would have been ready to deprive himself of his daughters also and take both to the convent. Eva longed to go, and Els might find there a new and beautiful happiness, like his sister, the Abbess Kunigunde. In the Eysvogel house, never!

During these hasty reflections Els extended her hand toward him, and the shining gold circlet which her lover had placed on her ring finger glittered in

the torchlight. A thought darted through his brain with the speed of lightning, and without hesitation he drew the ring from the hand of his astonished daughter, whispering curtly, yet tenderly, in reply to her anxious cry, "What are you doing?" "Trust me, child."

Then hastily approaching Casper Eysvogel, he beckoned to him to move a little aside from the group.

The other followed, believing that Herr Ernst would now promise the sum requested, yet firmly resolved, much as he needed it, to refuse.

Ernst Ortlieb, however, made no allusion to business matters, but with a swift gesture handed him the ring which united their two children. Then, after a rapid glance around had assured him that no one had followed them, he whispered to Herr Casper: "Tell your Wolff that he was, and would have remained, dear to us; but my daughter seems to me too good for his father's house and for kindred who fear that she will bring injury and shame upon them. Your wish is fulfilled. I hereby break the betrothal."

"And, in so doing, you only anticipate the step which I intended to take with more cogent motives," replied Casper Eysvogel with cool composure, shrugging his shoulders contemptuously. "The city will judge to-morrow which of the two parties was compelled to sever a bond sacred in the sight of God and men. Unfortunately, it is

impossible for me to give your daughter the good opinion you cherish of my son."

Drawing his stately figure to its full height as he spoke, he gazed at his diminutive adversary with a look of haughty contempt and, without vouchsafing a word in farewell, turned his back upon him.

Repressed fury was seething in Ernst Orlieb's breast, and he would scarcely have succeeded in controlling himself longer but for the consolation afforded by the thought that every tie was sundered between his daughter and this cold, arrogant, unjust man and his haughty, evil-disposed kindred. But when he again looked for the daughter on whom his hasty act had doubtless inflicted a severe blow, she was no longer visible.

Directly after he took the ring she had glided silently, unnoticed by most of the company, up the stairs to the second story. Cordula von Montfort told him this in a low tone.

Els had made no answer to her questions, but her imploring, tearful eyes pierced the young countess to the heart. Her quick ear had caught Siebenburg's malicious words and Casper Eysvogel's harsh response and, with deep pity, she felt how keenly the poor girl must suffer.

The happiness of a whole life destroyed without any fault of her own! From their first meeting Els had seemed to her incapable of any careless error, and she had merely tried, by her bold inter-

ference, to protect her from the gossip of evil tongues. But Heinz Schorlin had just approached and whispered that, by his knightly honour, Els was a total stranger to him, and he only wished he might find his own dear sister at home as pure and free from any fault.

Poor child! But the countess knew who had frustrated her intervention in behalf of Els. It was Sir Seitz Siebenburg, "the Mustache," whose officious homage, at first amusing, had long since become repulsive. Her heart shrank from the thought that, merely from vain pleasure in having a throng of admirers, she had given this scoundrel more than one glance of encouragement. The riding whip fairly quivered in her right hand as, after informing Ernst Ortlieb where Els had gone, she warned the gentlemen that it was time to depart, and Seitz Siebenburg submissively, yet as familiarly as if he had a right to her special favour, held out his hand in farewell.

But Countess Cordula withdrew hers with visible dislike, saying in a tone of chilling repulse: "Remember me to your wife, Sir Knight. Tell her to take care that her twin sons resemble their father as little as possible."

"Then you want to have two ardent admirers the less?" asked Siebenburg gaily, supposing that the countess's remark was a jest.

But when she did not, as he expected, give these insulting words an interpretation favourable

to him, but merely shrugged her shoulders scornfully, he added, glancing fiercely at the Swiss knight:

"True, you would doubtless be better pleased should the boys grow up to resemble the lucky Sir Heinz Schorlin, for whose sake you proved yourself the inventor of tales more marvellous, if not more credible, than the most skilful travelling minstrel."

"Perhaps so," replied the countess with contemptuous brevity. "But I should be satisfied if the twins—and this agrees with my first wish—should grow up honest men. If you should pay me the honour of a visit during the next few days, Sir Seitz, I could not receive it."

With these words she turned away, paying no further heed to him, though he called her name aloud, as if half frantic.

CHAPTER XI.

It was after midnight when the servants closed the heavy door of the Ortlieb mansion. The late guests had left it, mounted their horses, and ridden away together through the Frauenthor into the city.

The moon no longer lighted their way. A sultry wind had swept from the southwest masses of grey clouds, which constantly grew denser and darker. Heinz Schorlin did not notice it, but his follower, Biberli, called his attention to the rising storm and entreated him to choose the nearest road to the city. To remain outside the gate in such darkness would be uncomfortable, nay, perhaps not without peril, but the knight merely flung him the peevish answer, "So much the better," and, to Biberli's surprise, turned into St. Klarengasse, which brought him by no means nearer to his distant lodgings in the Bindergasse.

It was unfortunate to be warmly devoted to a master who had no fear, whom he was obliged to serve as a messenger of love, and who now probably scarcely knew himself whither this love would lead him.

But true and steadfast Biberli would really have followed Sir Heinz, not only in a dangerous nocturnal ramble, but through all the terrors of hell. So he only glanced down at his long, lean legs, which would be exposed here to the bites of the dogs, with whom he stood on especially bad terms, raised his long robe higher, as the paths over which they must pass were of doubtful cleanliness, and deemed it a good omen when his foot struck against a stout stick, which his patron saint had perhaps thrown in his way as a weapon. Its possession was somewhat soothing, it is true, yet he did not regain the pleasant consciousness of peace in which his soul had rejoiced a few short hours before.

He knew what to expect from the irritable mood into which recent events appeared to have thrown his master. Heinz usually soon forgot any such trivial disappointment, but the difficulty threatening himself and Kätterle was far worse—nay, might even assume terrible proportions.

These alarming thoughts made him sigh so deeply that Heinz turned towards him.

He would gladly have relieved his own troubled breast in the same way. Never before had the soul of this light-hearted child of good fortune served as the arena for so fierce a struggle of contending emotions.

He loved Eva, and the image of her white, supernaturally beautiful figure, flooded by the moon-

light, still stood before him as distinctly as when, after her disappearance, he had resolved to plead his suit for her to her sister; but the usually reckless fellow asked himself, shuddering, what would have happened had he obeyed Eva's summons and been found with her, as he had just been surprised with her sister. She was not wholly free from guilt, for her note had really contained an invitation to a meeting; yet she escaped. But his needless impetuosity and her sudden appearance before the house had placed her modest, charming sister, the betrothed bride of the gallant fellow who had fought with him in the Marchfield, in danger of being misunderstood and despised. If the finger of scorn were pointed at her, if a stain rested on her fair fame, the austere Wolff Eysvogel would hardly desire to make her his wife, and then this also would be his fault.

His kind, honest heart suffered keenly under these self-accusations, the first which he had ever heeded.

Hitherto the volatile young fellow, who had often gaily risked his life in battle and his last penny at the gaming table, had never thought of seriously examining his own soul, battling by his own strength of will against some secret longing and shunning its cause. On the contrary, from childhood he had accustomed himself to rely on the protection and aid of the Virgin and the saints; and when they passed the image with the ever-

burning lamp, where Kätterle had just sought and found consolation, he implored it not to let his bold intrusion into the home of the maiden he loved bring evil upon her and her sister. He also vowed to the convent and its saint—which, come what might, should also be his—a rich gift whenever the Emperor or the gaming table again filled his purse.

The thought of being burdened his whole life long with the reproach of having made two such charming, innocent creatures miserable seemed unendurable. He would gladly have given gold and blood to remove it.

It was too late that day, but he resolved to go to the confessional on the morrow, for absolution had always relieved and lightened his heart. But how trivial his errors had been! True, the wrong he had now committed was not a mortal sin, and would hardly impose a severe penance upon him, yet it burdened him like the most infamous crime. He did not understand himself, and often wondered why he, reckless Heinz, thus made a mountain out of a molehill. Yet when, after this reflection, he uttered a sigh of relief, it seemed as if a voice within commanded him not to think lightly of what had passed, for on that evening he had ceased to bestow pleasure on every one, and instead of, as usual, being helpful and agreeable, he had plunged others who had done him no wrong—nay, perhaps a whole household, whose

daughter had given him the first love of her young heart—into misery and disgrace. Had he considered the consequences of his act, he would still be merry Heinz. Then he remembered how, when a boy, playing with other lads high up among the mountains just as it was beginning to thaw, he had hurled the work they had finished with so much toil, a snow man, down the slope, rejoicing with his playfellows over its swift descent towards the valley, until they noticed with what frightful speed its bulk increased as it sped over its snowy road, till at last, like a terrible avalanche, it swept away a herdman's hut—fortunately an empty one. Now, also, his heedlessness had set in motion a mass which constantly rolled onward, and how terrible might be the harm it would do!

If Hartmann, the Emperor's son, were only there! He confided everything to him, for he was sure of his silence. Both his duty as a knight and his conscience forbade him to relate his experiences and ask counsel from any one else.

He was still absorbed in these gloomy thoughts when, just before reaching the Walch, he heard Biberli's deep sigh. Here, behind and beside the frames of the cloth weavers, stood the tents before which the followers and soldiers of the princes and dignitaries who had come to the Reichstag were still sitting around the camp fire, carousing and laughing.

Any interruption was welcome to him, and to Biberli it seemed like a deliverance to be permitted to use his poor endangered tongue, for his master had asked what grief oppressed him.

"If you desired to know what trouble did not burden my soul I could find a speedier answer," replied Biberli piteously. "Oh, this night, my lord! What has it not brought upon us and others! Look at the black clouds rising in the south. They are like the dark days impending over us poor mortals."

Then he confided to Heinz his fears for himself and Kätterle. The knight's assurance that he would intercede for him and, if necessary, even appeal to the Emperor's favour, somewhat cheered his servitor's drooping spirits, it is true, but by no means restored his composure, and his tone was lugubrious enough as he went on:

"And the poor innocent girl in the Ortlieb house! Your little lady, my lord, broke the bread she must now eat herself, but the other, the older E."

"I know," interrupted the knight sorrowfully. "But if the gracious Virgin aids us, they will continue to believe in the wager Cordula von Montfort——"

"She! she!" Biberli exclaimed, enthusiastically waving his stick aloft. "The Lord created her in a good hour. Such a heart! Such friendly kindness! And to think that she interposed so

graciously for you—you, Sir Heinz, to whom she showed the favour of combing your locks, as if you were already her promised husband, and who afterwards, for another's sake, left her at the ball as if she wore a fern cap and had become invisible. I saw the whole from the musician's gallery. True, the somnambulist is marvellously beautiful."

But the knight interrupted him by exclaiming so vehemently "Silence!" that he paused.

Both walked on without speaking for some distance ere Heinz began again:

"Even though I live to grow old and grey, never shall I behold aught more beautiful than the vision of that white-robed girlish figure on the stairs."

True and steadfast Biberli sighed faintly. Love for Eva Ortlieb held his master as if in a vise; but a Schorlin seemed to him far too good a match for a Nuremberg maiden who had grown up among sacks of pepper and chests of goods and, moreover, was a somnambulist. He looked higher for his Heinz, and had already found the right match for him. So, turning to him again, he said earnestly:

"Drive the bewitching vision from your mind, Sir Heinz. You don't know—but I could tell you some tales about women who walk in their sleep by moonlight."

"Well?" asked Heinz eagerly.

"As a maiden," Biberli continued impressively,

with the pious intention of guarding his master from injury, "the somnambulist merely runs the risk of falling from the roof, or whatever accident may happen to a sleepwalker; but if she enters the estate of holy matrimony, the evil power which has dominion over her sooner or later transforms her at midnight into a *troll*, which seizes her husband's throat in his sleep and strangles him."

"Nursery tales!" cried Heinz angrily, but Biberli answered calmly:

"It can make no difference to you what occurs in the case of such possessed women, for henceforward the Ortlieb house will be closed against you. And—begging your pardon—it is fortunate. For, my lord, the horse mounted by the first Schorlin—the chaplain showed it to you in the picture—came from the ark in which Noah saved it with the other animals from the deluge, and the first Lady Schorlin whom the family chronicles mention was a countess. Your ancestresses came from citadels and castles; no Schorlin ever yet brought his bride from a tradesman's house. You, the proudest of them all, will scarcely think of making such an error, though it is true——"

"Ernst Ortlieb, spite of his trade, is a man of knightly lineage, to whom the king of arms opens the lists at every tournament!" exclaimed Heinz indignantly.

"In the combat with blunt weapons," replied Biberli contemptuously.

"Nay, for the jousts and single combat," cried Heinz excitedly. "The Emperor Frederick himself dubbed Herr Ernst a knight."

"You know best," replied Biberli modestly. "But his coat of arms, like his entry, smells of cloves and pepper. Here is another, however, who, like your first ancestress, has a countess's title, and who has a right—— My name isn't Biberli if your lady mother at home would not be more than happy were I to inform her that the Countess von Montfort and the darling of her heart, which you are——"

"The name of Montfort and what goes with it," Heinz interrupted, "would surely please those at home. But the rest! Where could a girl be found who, setting aside Cordula's kind heart, would be so great a contrast to my mother in every respect?"

"Stormy mornings merge into quiet days," said the servant. "Everything depends, my lord, upon the heart of which you speak so slightingly—the heart and, even above that, upon the blood. 'Help is needed there,' cried the kind heart just now, and then the blood did its *devoir*. The act followed the desire as the sound follows the blow of the hammer, the thunder the flash of lightning. Well for the castle that is ruled by such a mistress! I am only the servant, and respect commands me to curb my tongue; but to-day I had news from home through the Provost Werner, of Lucerne,

whom I knew at Stansstadt. I meant to tell you of it over the wine at the Thirsty Troopers, but that accursed note and the misfortune which followed prevented. It will not make either of us more cheerful, but whoever is ordered by the leech to drink gall and wormwood does wisely to swallow the dose at one gulp. Do you wish to empty the cup now?"

The knight nodded assent, and Biberli went on. "Home affairs are not going as they ought. Though your uncle's hair is already grey, the knightly blood in his veins makes him grasp the sword too quickly. The quarrel about the bridge-toll has broken out again more violently than ever. The townsfolk drove off our cattle as security and, by way of punishment, your uncle seized the goods of their merchants, and they came to blows. True, the Schorlin retainers forced back the men from town with bloody heads, but if the feud lasts much longer we cannot hold out, for the others have the money, and since the war cry has sounded less frequently there has been no lack of men at arms who will serve any one who pays. Besides, the townsfolk can appeal to the treaty of peace, and if your uncle continues to seize the merchant's wares they will apply to the imperial magistrate, and then——"

"Then," cried Heinz eagerly, "then the time will have come for me to leave the court and return home to look after my rights."

"A single arm, no matter how strong it may be, can avail nothing there, my lord," Biberli protested earnestly. "Your Uncle Ramsweg has scarcely his peer as a leader, but even were it not so you could not bring yourself to send the old man home and put yourself in his place. Besides, it would be as unwise as it is unjust. What is lacking at home is money to pay the town what it demands for the use of the bridge, or to increase the number of your men, and therefore——"

"Well?" asked Heinz eagerly.

"Therefore seek the Countess von Montfort, who favours you above every one else," was the reply; "for with her all you need will be yours without effort. Her dowry will suffice to settle twenty such bridge dues, and if it should come to a fray, the brave huntress will ride to the field at your side with helmet and spear. Which of the four Fs did Countess Cordula von Montfort ever lack?"

"The four Fs?" asked Heinz, listening intently.

"The Fs," explained the ex-pedagogue, "are the four letters which marriageable knights should consider. They are: Family, figure, favour, and fortune. But hold your cap on! What a hot blast this is, as if the storm were coming straight from the jaws of hell. And the dust! Where did all these withered leaves come from in the month of June? They are whirling about as if the foliage had already fallen. There are big raindrops driv-

ing into my face too—— B-r-r! You need all four Fs. No rain will wash a single one of them away, and I hope it won't efface the least word of my speech either. What, according to human foresight, could be lacking to secure the fairest happiness, if you and the countess——"

"Love," replied Heinz Schorlin curtly.

"That will come of itself," cried Biberli, as if sure of what he was saying, "if the bride is Countess Cordula."

"Possibly," answered the knight, "but the heart must not be filled by another's image."

Here he paused, for in the darkness he had stumbled into the ditch by the road.

The whirlwind which preceded the bursting of the storm blew such clouds of dust and everything it contained into their faces that it was difficult to advance. But Biberli was glad, for he had not yet found a fitting answer. He struggled silently on beside his master against the wind, until it suddenly subsided, and a violent storm of rain streamed in big warm drops on the thirsty earth and the belated pedestrians. Then, spite of Heinz's protestations, Biberli hurriedly snatched the long robe embroidered with the St from his shoulders and threw it over his master, declaring that his shirt was as safe from injury as his skin, but the rain would ruin the knight's delicate embroidered doublet.

Then he drew over his head the hood which hung from his coat, and meanwhile must have de-

cided upon an answer, for as soon as they moved on he began again: "You must drive your love for the beautiful sleepwalker out of your mind. Try to do so, my dear, dear master, for the sake of your lady mother, your young sister who will soon be old enough to marry, our light-hearted Maria, and the good old castle. For your own happiness, your lofty career, which began so gloriously, you must hear me! O master, my dear master, tear from your heart the image of the little Nuremberg witch, tempting though it is, I admit. The wound will bleed for a brief time, but after so much mirthful pleasure a fleeting disappointment in love, I should think, would not be too hard to bear if it will be speedily followed by the fairest and most enduring happiness."

Here a flash of lightning, which illumined the hospital door close before them, and made every surrounding object as bright as day, interrupted the affectionate entreaty of the faithful fellow, and at the same time a tremendous peal of thunder crashed and rattled through the air.

Master and servant crossed themselves, but Heinz exclaimed:

"That struck the tower yonder. A little farther to the left, and all doubts and misgivings would have been ended."

"You can say that!" exclaimed Biberli reproachfully while passing with his master through the gate which had just been opened for an imperial

messenger. "And you dare to make such a speech in the midst of this heavenly wrath! For the sake of a pair of lovely eyes you are ready to execrate a life which the saints have so blessed with every gift that thousands and tens of thousands would not give it up from sheer gratitude and joy, even if it were not a blasphemous crime!"

Again the lightning and thunder drowned his words. Biberli's heart trembled, and muttering prayers beseeching protection from the avenging hand above, he walked swiftly onward till they reached the Corn Market. Here they were again stopped, for, notwithstanding the late hour, a throng of people, shouting and wailing, was just pouring from the Ledergasse into the square, headed by a night watchman provided with spear, horn, and lantern, a bailiff, torchbearers, and some police officers, who were vainly trying to silence the loudest outcries.

Again a brilliant flash of lightning pierced the black mass of clouds, and Heinz, shuddering, pointed to the crowd and asked, "Do you suppose the lightning killed the man whom they are carrying yonder?"

"Let me see," replied Biberli, among whose small vices curiosity was by no means the least. He must have understood news gathering thoroughly, for he soon returned and informed Heinz, who had sought shelter from the rain under the broad bow window of a lofty house, that the bear-

ers were just carrying to his parents' home a young man whose thread of life had been suddenly severed by a stab through the breast in a duel. After the witnesses had taken the corpse to the leech Otto, in the Ledergasse, and the latter said that the youth was dead, they had quickly dispersed, fearing a severe punishment on account of the breach of the peace. The murdered man was Ulrich Vorchtel, the oldest son of the wealthy Berthold Vorchel, who collected the imperial taxes.

Again Heinz shuddered. He had seen the unfortunate young man the day before yesterday at the fencing school, and yesterday, full of overflowing mirth, at the dance, and knew that he, too, had fought in the battle of Marchfield. His foe must have been master of the art of wielding the sword, for the dead man had been a skilful fencer, and was tall and stalwart in figure.

When the servant ended his story Heinz stood still in the darkness for a time, silently listening. The bells had begun to ring, the blast of the watchman's horn blended with the wailing notes summoning aid, and in two places—near the Thiergartenthor and the Frauenthor—the sky was crimsoned by the reflection of a conflagration, probably kindled by some flash of lightning, which flickered over the clouds, alternately rising and falling, sometimes deeper and anon paler in hue. Throngs of people, shouting "Fire!" pressed from

the cross streets into the square. The stillness of the night was over.

When Heinz again turned to Biberli he said in a hollow tone:

"If the earth should swallow up Nuremberg to-night it would not surprise me. But over yonder —look, Biber, the Duke of Pomerania's quarters in the Green Shield are still lighted. I'll wager that they are yet at the gaming table. A plague upon it! I would be there, too, if my purse allowed. I feel as if yonder dead man and his coffin were burdening my soul. If it was really good fortune in love that snatched the zecchins from my purse yesterday——"

"Then," cried Biberli eagerly, "to-night is the very time, ere Countess Cordula teaches you to forget what troubles you, to win them back. The gold for the first stake is at your disposal."

"From the Duke of Pomerania, you think?" asked Heinz; then, in a quick, resolute tone, added: "No! Often as the duke has offered me his purse, I never borrow from my peers when the prospect of repayment looks so uncertain."

"Gently, my lord," returned Biberli, slapping his belt importantly. "Here is what you need for the stake as your own property. No miracles have been wrought for us, only I forgot—— But look! There are the black clouds rolling north-

ward over the castle. That was a frightful storm! But a spendthrift doesn't keep house long—and the thunder has not yet followed that last flash of lightning. There is plenty of uproar without it. It's hard work to hear one's self speak amid all the ringing, trumpeting, yelling, and shrieking. It seems as if they expected to put out the fire with noise. The fathers of the city can attend to that. It doesn't appear to disturb the duke and his guests at their dice; and here, my lord, are fifty florins which, I think, will do for the beginning."

Biberli handed the knight a little bag containing this sum, and when Heinz asked in perplexity where he obtained it, the ex-schoolmaster answered gaily: "They came just in the nick of time. I received them from Süss, the jockey, while you were out riding this afternoon."

"For the black?" Heinz enquired.

"Certainly, my lord. It's a pity about the splendid stallion. But, as you know, he has the staggers, and when I struck him on the coronet he stood as if rooted to the earth, and the equerry, who was there, said that the disease was proved. So the Jew silently submitted, let the horse be led away, and paid back what we gave him. Fifty heavy florins! More than enough for a beginning. If I may advise you, count on the two and the five when fixed numbers are to be thrown or hit. Why? Because you must turn your ill luck in love to ad-

vantage; and those from whom it comes are the two beautiful Ortlieb Es, as Nuremberg folk call the ladies Els and Eva. That makes the two. But E is the fifth letter in the alphabet, so I should choose the five. If Biberli did not put things together shrewdly——"

"He would be as oversharp as he has often been already," Heinz interrupted, but he patted Biberli's wet arm as he spoke, and added kindly: "Yet every day proves that my Biberli is a true and steadfast fellow; but where in the wide world did you, a schoolmaster, gain instruction in the art of throwing the dice?"

"While we were studying in Paris, with my dead foster brother," replied the servant with evident emotion. "But now go up, my lord, before the fire alarm, and I know not what else, makes the people upstairs separate. The iron must be forged during this wild night. Only a few drops of rain are falling. You can cross the street dry even without my long garment."

While speaking he divested the knight of his robe, and continued eagerly: "Now, my lord, from the coffin, or let us say rather the leaden weight, which oppresses your soul, let a bolt be melted that will strike misfortune to the heart. Glittering gold has a cheering colour."

"Stop! stop!" Heinz interrupted positively. "No good wishes on the eve of hunting or gaming.

But if I come bounding down the stairs of the Green Shield with a purse as heavy as my heart is just now—why, Biberli, success puts a new face on many things, and yours shall again look at me without anxiety."

CHAPTER XII.

THE thunderclouds had gathered in the blackest masses above the Frauenthor and the Ortlieb mansion. Ere the storm burst the oppressive atmosphere had burdened the hearts within as heavily as it weighed outside upon tree, bush, and all animated creation.

In the servants' rooms under the roof the maids slept quietly and dreamlessly; and the men, with their mouths wide open, snored after the labour of the day, unconscious of what was passing outside in the sky or the events within which had destroyed the peace of their master and his family.

The only bed unoccupied was the one in the little room next to the stairs leading to the garret, which was occupied by Kätterle. The Swiss, kneeling before it with her face buried in the coarse linen pillow case, alternately sobbed, prayed, and cursed herself and her recklessness.

When the gale, which preceded the thunderstorm, blew leaves and straws in through the open window she started violently, imagining that Herr Ortlieb had come to call her to account and her

trial was to begin. The barber's widow, whom she had seen a few days before in the pillory, with a stone around her neck, because she had allowed a cloth weaver's heedless daughter to come to her lodging with a handsome trumpeter who belonged to the city musicians, rose before her mental vision. How the poor thing had trembled and moaned after the executioner's assistant hung the heavy stone around her neck! Then, driven frantic by the jeers and insults of the people, the missiles flung by the street boys, and the unbearable burden, she could control herself no longer but, pouring forth a flood of curses, thrust out her tongue at her tormentors.

What a spectacle! But ere she, Kätterle, would submit to such disgrace she would bid farewell to life with all its joys; and even to the countryman to whom her heart clung, and who, spite of his well-proven truth and steadfastness, had brought misery upon her.

Now the memory of the hateful word which she, too, had called to the barber's widow weighed heavily on her heart. Never, never again would she be arrogant to a neighbour who had fallen into misfortune.

This vow, and many others, she made to St. Clare; then her thoughts wandered to the city moat, to the Pegnitz, the Fischbach, and all the other streams in and near Nuremberg, where it was possible to drown and thus escape the terrible disgrace which

threatened her. But in so doing she had doubtless committed a heavy sin; for while recalling the Dutzen Pond, from whose dark surface she had often gathered white water lilies after passing through the Frauenthor into the open fields, and wondering in what part of its reedy shore her design could be most easily executed, a brilliant flash of lightning blazed through her room, and at the same time a peal of thunder shook the old mansion to its foundations.

That was meant for her and her wicked thoughts. No! For the sake of escaping disgrace here on earth, she dared not trifle with eternal salvation and the hope of seeing her dead mother in the other world.

The remembrance of that dear mother, who had laboured so earnestly to train her in every good path, soothed her. Surely she was looking down upon her and knew that she had remained upright and honest, that she had not defrauded her employers of even a pin, and that the little fault which was to be so grievously punished had been committed solely out of love for her countryman, who in his truth and steadfastness meant honestly by her. What Biberli requested her to do could be no heavy sin.

But the powers above seemed to be of a different opinion; for again a dazzling glare of light illumined the room, and the crash and rattle of the thunder of the angry heavens accompanied it

with a deafening din. Kätterle shrieked aloud; it seemed as if the gates of hell had opened before her, or the destruction of the world had begun.

Frantic with terror, she sprang back from the window, through which the raindrops were already sprinkling her face. They cooled her flushed cheeks and brought her back to reality. The offence she had just committed was no trivial one. She, whom Herr Ortlieb, with entire confidence, had placed in the service of the fair young girl whose invalid mother could not care for her, had permitted herself to be induced to persuade Eva, who was scarcely beyond childhood, to a rendezvous with a man whom she represented to the inexperienced maiden as a godly, virtuous knight, though she knew from Biberli how far the latter surpassed his master in fidelity and steadfastness.

"Lead us not into temptation!" How often she had repeated the words in the Lord's Prayer, and now she herself had become the serpent that tempted into sin the innocent child whom duty should have commanded her to guard.

No, no! The guilt for which she was threatened with punishment was by no means small, and even if her earthly judge did not call her to account, she would go to confession to-morrow and honestly perform the penance imposed.

Moved by these thoughts, she gazed across the courtyard to the convent. Just at that moment the lightning again flashed, the thunder pealed,

and she covered her face with her hands. When she lowered her arms she saw on the roof of the nuns' granary, which adjoined the cow-stable, a slender column of smoke, followed by a narrow tongue of flame, which grew steadily brighter.

The lightning had set it on fire.

Sympathy for the danger and losses of others forced her own grief and anxiety into the background and, without pausing to think, she slipped on her shoes, snatched her shawl from the chest, and ran downstairs, shouting: "The lightning has struck! The convent is burning!"

Just at that moment the door of the chamber occupied by the two sisters opened, and Ernst Ortlieb, with tangled hair and pallid cheeks, came toward her.

Within the room the dim light of the little lamp and the fiery glare of the lightning illumined tear-stained, agitated faces.

After Heinz Schorlin had called to her, and Els had hurried to her aid, Eva, clad in her long, plain night robe, and barefooted, just as she had risen from her couch, followed the maid to her room. What must the knight, who but yesterday, she knew, had looked up to her as to a saint, think of her now?

She felt as if she were disgraced, stained with shame. Yet it was through no fault of her own, and overwhelmed by the terrible conviction that mysterious, supernatural powers, against which re-

sistance was hopeless, were playing a cruel game with her, she had felt as if the stormy sea were tossing her in a rudderless boat on its angry surges.

Unable to seek consolation in prayer, as usual, she had given herself up to dull despair, but only for a short time. Els had soon returned, and the firm, quiet manner with which her prudent, helpful friend and sister met her, and even tried to raise her drooping courage by a jest ere she sent her to their mother's sick room, had fallen on her soul like refreshing dew; not because Els promised to act for her—on the contrary, what she intended to do roused her to resistance.

She had been far too guilty and oppressed to oppose her, yet indignation concerning the sharp words which Els had uttered about the knight, and her intention of forbidding him the house, perhaps forever, had stimulated her like strong acid wine.

Not until after her sister had left her did she become capable of clearly understanding what she had felt during her period of somnambulism.

While her mother, thanks to a narcotic, slept soundly, breathing quietly, and in the entry below something, she knew not what, perhaps due to her father's return, was occurring, she sat thinking, pondering, while an impetuous throng of rebellious wishes raised their voices, alternately asking and denying, in her agitated breast.

How she had happened to rise from her couch

and go out had vanished utterly from her memory, but she was still perfectly conscious of her feelings during the night walk. If hitherto she had yearned to drain heavenly bliss from the chalice of faith, during her wanderings through the house she had longed for nothing save to drink her fill from the cup of earthly joy. Ardent kisses, of which she had forbidden herself even to think, she awaited with blissful delight. Her timorous heart, held in check by virgin modesty, accustomed to desire nothing save what she could have confessed to her sister and the abbess, seemed as if it had cast off every fetter and boldly resolved to risk the most daring deeds. The somnambulist had longed for the moment when, after Heinz Schorlin's confession that he loved her, she could throw her arms around his neck with rapturous gratitude.

If, while awake, she had desired only to speak to him of her saint and of his duty to overthrow the foes of the Church, she had wished while gazing at the moon from the stairs, and in front of the house door, to whisper sweet words of love, listen to his, and in so doing forget herself, the world, and everything which did not belong to him, to her, and their love.

And she remembered this longing and yearning in a way very unlike a mere dream. It seemed rather as if, while the moon was attracting her by its magic power, something, which had long slum-

bered in the depths of her soul, had waked to life; something, from which formerly, ere her heart and mind had been able rightly to understand it, she had shrunk with pious horror, had assumed a tangible form.

Now she dreaded this newly recognised sinful part of her own nature, which she had imagined a pure vessel that had room only for what was noble, sacred, and innocent.

She, too—she knew it now—was only a girl like those on whose desire for love she had looked down with arrogant contempt, no bride of heaven or saint.

She had not yet taken the veil, and it was fortunate, for what would have become of her had she not discovered until after her profession this part of her nature, which she thought every true nun, if she possessed it, must discard, like the hair which was shorn from her head, before taking the vow of the order.

During this self-inspection it became more and more evident that she was not one person, but two in one—a twofold nature with a single body and two distinct souls; and this conviction caused her as much pain as if the cut which had produced the separation were still bleeding.

Just at that moment her eyes fell upon the image of the Virgin opposite, and the usual impulse to lift her soul in prayer took possession of her even more powerfully than a short time before.

With fervent warmth she besought her to release her from this newly awakened nature, which surely could not be pleasing in the sight of Heaven, and let her once more become what she was before the unfortunate ramble in the moonlight.

But the composure she needed for prayer was soon destroyed, for the image of the knight rose before her again and again, and it seemed as if her own name, which he had called with such ardent longing, once more rang in her ears.

Whoever thus raises his voice in appeal to another loves that person. Heinz Schorlin's love was great and sincere and, instead of heeding the inner voice that warned her to return to prayer, she cried defiantly, "I will not!"

She could not yet part from the man for whom her heart throbbed with such passionate yearning, who was so brave and godly, so ardently devoted to her.

True, it had been peacefully beautiful to dream herself into the bright glory of heaven, yet the stormy rapture she had felt while thinking of him and his love seemed richer and greater. She could not, would not part from him.

Then she remembered her sister's intention of driving Heinz—Eva already called the knight by that name in her soliloquy—from her presence, and the thought that she might perhaps wound him so keenly that knightly honour would forbid his return alarmed and incensed her.

What right had Els to distrust him? A godly knight played no base game with the chosen lady of his heart, and that, yes, that she certainly was, since she had named her colour to him. Nothing should separate them. She needed him for her happiness as much as she did light and air. Hitherto she had longed for bliss in another world, but she was so young she probably had a long life before her, and what could existence on earth offer if robbed of the hope of his possession?

The newly awakened part of her nature demanded its rights. It would never again allow itself to be forced into the old slumber.

If her sister came back and boasted of having driven away the dangerous animal forever, she would show her that she had a different opinion of the knight, and would permit no one to interpose between them. But, while still pondering over this plan, the door of the sick-room was softly opened and her father beckoned to her to follow him.

Silently leading the way through the dusky corridor, no longer illumined by the moonlight, he entered his daughter's room before her. The lamp, still burning there, revealed the agitated face of her sister who, resting her chin on her hand, sat on the stool beside the spinning wheel.

Eva's courage, which had blazed up so brightly, instantly fell again.

"Good heavens! What has happened?" she

cried in terror; but her father answered in a hollow tone:

"For the sake of your noble sister, to whom I pledged my word, I will force myself to remain calm. But look at her! Her poor heart must be like a graveyard, for she was doomed to bury what she held dearest. And who," he continued furiously, so carried away by grief and indignation as to be unmindful of his promise to maintain his composure, "who is to blame for it all, save you and your boundless imprudence?"

Eva, with uplifted hands, tried to explain how, unconscious of her acts, she had walked in her sleep down the stairs and out of the house, but he imperiously cut her short with:

"Silence! I know all. My daughter gave a worthless tempter the right to expect the worst from her. You, whom we deemed the ornament of this house, whose purity hitherto was stainless, are to blame if people passing on the street point at it! Alas! alas! Our honour, our ancient, unsullied name!"

Groaning aloud, the father struck his brow with his clenched hand; but when Els rose and passed her arm around his shoulders to speak words of consolation, Eva, who hitherto had vainly struggled for words, could endure no more.

"Whoever says that of me, my father," she exclaimed with flashing eyes, scarcely able to control her voice, "has opened his ears to slander; and

whoever terms Heinz Schorlin a worthless tempter, is blinded by a delusion, and I call him to his face, even were it my own father, to whom I owe gratitude and respect——"

But here she stopped and extended her arms to keep off the deeply angered man, for he had started forward with quivering lips, and—she perceived it clearly—was already under the spell of one of the terrible fits of fury which might lead him to the most unprecedented deeds. Els, however, had clung to him and, while holding him back with all her strength, cried out in a tone of keen reproach, "Is this the way you keep your promise?"

Then, lowering her voice, she continued with loving entreaty: "My dear, dear father, can you doubt that she was asleep, unconscious of her acts, when she did what has brought so much misery upon us?"

And, interrupting herself, she added eagerly in a tone of the firmest conviction: "No, no, neither shame nor misery has yet touched you, my father, nor the poor child yonder. The suspicion of evil rests on me, and me alone, and if any one here must be wretched it is I."

Then Herr Ernst, regaining his self-control, drew back from Eva, but the latter, as if fairly frantic, exclaimed: "Do you want to drive me out of my senses by your mysterious words and accusations? What, in the name of all the saints, has

happened that can plunge my Els into misery and shame?"

"Into misery and shame," repeated her father in a hollow tone, throwing himself into a chair, where he sat motionless, with his face buried in his hands, while Els told her sister what had occurred when she went down into the entry to speak to the knight.

Eva listened to her story, fairly gasping for breath. For one brief moment she cherished the suspicion that Cordula had not acted from pure sympathy, but to impose upon Heinz Schorlin a debt of gratitude which would bind him to her more firmly. Yet when she heard that her father had given back his daughter's ring to Herr Casper Eysvogel and broken his child's betrothal she thought of nothing save her sister's grief and, sobbing aloud, threw herself into Els's arms.

The girls held each other in a close embrace until the first flash of lightning and peal of thunder interrupted the conversation.

The father and daughters had been so deeply agitated that they had not heard the storm rising outside, and the outbreak of the tempest surprised them. The peal of thunder, which so swiftly followed the lightning, also startled them and when, soon after, a second one shook the house with its crashing, rattling roar, Herr Ernst went out to wake the chief packer. But old Endres was already keeping watch among the wares entrusted

to him and when, after a brief absence, the master of the house returned, he found Eva again clasped in her sister's arms, and saw the latter kissing her brow and eyes as she tenderly strove to comfort her.

But Eva seemed deaf to her soothing words. Els, her faithful Els, was no longer the betrothed bride of her Wolff; her great, beautiful happiness was destroyed forever. On the morrow all Nuremberg would learn that Herr Casper had broken his son's betrothal pledge, because his bride, for the sake of a tempter, Sir Heinz Schorlin, had failed to keep her troth with him.

How deeply all this pierced Eva's heart! how terrible was the torture of the thought that she was the cause of this frightful misfortune! Dissolved in an agony of tears, she entreated the poor girl to forgive her; and Els did so willingly, and in a way that touched her father to the very depths of his heart. How good the girls must be who, spite of the sore suffering which one had brought upon the other, were still so loving and loyal!

Convinced that Eva, too, had done nothing worthy of punishment, he went towards them to clasp both in his arms, but ere he could do so the clap of thunder which had frightened Kätterle so terribly shook the whole room. "St. Clare, aid us!" cried Eva, crossing herself and falling upon her knees; but Els rushed to the window, opened it, and looked down the street. Nothing was visi-

ble there save a faint red glow on the distant northern horizon, and two mailed soldiers who were riding into the city at a rapid trot. They had been sent from the stables in the Marienthurm to keep order in case a fire should break out. Several men with hooks and poles followed, also hurrying to the Frauenthor.

In reply to the question where the fire was and where they going, they answered: "To the Fischbach, to help. Flames have burst out apparently under the fortress at the Thiergartenthor."

The long-drawn call for help from the warder's horn, which came at the same moment, proved that the men were right.

Herr Ernst hastened out of the room just as Kätterle's shriek, "The lightning struck! the convent is burning!" rung from the upper step of the stairs.

He had already pronounced her sentence, and the sight of her roused his wrath again so vehemently that, spite of the urgent peril, he shouted to her that, whatever claimed his attention now, she certainly should not escape the most severe punishment for her shameful conduct.

Then he ordered old Endres and two of the menservants to watch the sleeping-room of his invalid wife, that in case anything should happen the helpless woman might be instantly borne to a place of safety.

Ere he himself went to the scene of the conflagration he hurried back to his daughters.

While the girls were giving him his hat and cloak he told them where the fire had broken out, and this caused another detention of the anxious master of the house, for Eva seized her shoes and stockings and, kicking her little slippers from her feet, declared that she, too, would not remain absent from the place when her dear nuns were in danger. But her father commanded her to stay with her mother and sister, and went to the door, turning back once more on the threshold to his daughters with the anxious entreaty: "Think of your mother!"

Another peal of thunder drowned the sound of his footsteps hurrying down the stairs. When Els, who had watched her father from the window a short time, went back to her sister, Eva dried her eyes and cheeks, saying: "Perhaps he is right; but whenever my heart urges me to obey any warm impulse, obstacles are put in my way. What a weak nonentity is the daughter of an honourable Nuremberg family!"

Els heard this complaint with astonishment. Was this her Eva, her "little saint," who yesterday had desired nothing more ardently than with humble obedience, far from the tumult of the world, to become worthy of her Heavenly Bridegroom, and in the quiet peace of the convent raise her soul to God? What had so changed the girl

in these few hours? Even the most worldly-minded of her friends would have taken such an impeachment ill.

But she had no time now to appeal to the conscience of her misguided sister. Love and duty summoned her to her mother's couch. And then! The child had become aware of her love, and was she, Els, who had been parted from Wolff by her own father, and yet did not mean to give him up, justified in advising her sister to cast aside her love and the hope of future happiness with and through the man to whom she had given her heart?

What miracles love wrought! If in a single night it had transformed the devout future Bride of Heaven into an ardently loving woman, it could accomplish the impossible for her also.

While Eva was gazing out of the window Els returned to her mother. She was still asleep and, without permitting either curiosity or longing to divert her from her duty, Els kept her place beside the couch of the beloved invalid, spite of the fire alarm which, though somewhat subdued, was heard in the room.

CHAPTER XIII.

Eva was standing at the open window. The violence of the storm seemed exhausted. The clouds were rolling northward, and the thunder followed the flashes of lightning at longer and longer intervals. Peace was restored to the heavens, but the crowd and noise in the city and the street constantly increased.

The iron tongues of the alarm bells had never swung so violently, the warder's horn had never made the air quiver with such resonant appeals for aid.

Nor did the metallic voices above call for help in vain, for while a roseate glow tinged the linden in front of her window and the houses on the opposite side of the street with the hues of dawn, the crowds thronging from the Frauenthor to St. Klarengasse grew denser and denser.

The convent was not visible from her chamber, but the acrid odor of the smoke and the loud voices which reached her ear from that direction proved that the fire was no trivial one. While she was seeking out the spot from which Heinz must

have looked up to her window, the Ortlieb menservants, with some of the Montfort retainers, came out of the house with pails and ladders.

A female figure glided into the dark street after them. A black shawl concealed her head and the upper part of her figure, and she held a bundle in her hand.

It must be Kätterle.

Where was she going at this hour? As she was carrying the package, she could scarcely intend to help in putting out the fire. Was she stealing away from fear of punishment? Poor thing! Even the maid was hurled into misfortune through her guilt.

It pierced her very heart. But while she called to Kätterle to stop her, something else, which engrossed her still more, diverted her attention—the loud voice of Countess Cordula reached her from the street door. With whom was she talking? Did the girl, who ventured upon so many things which ill-beseemed a modest maiden, intend to join the men? Eva forgot that she, too, would have hurried to the nuns had not her father prevented it. The countess was already standing in the courtyard.

After Eva had given her a hasty glance she again looked for the maid, but Kätterle had already vanished in the darkness. This grieved her; she had neglected something which might have saved the girl, to whom she was warmly

attached, from some imprudent act. But while attracted by the strange appearance of the countess she had forgotten the other.

Cordula had probably just left her couch, for she wore only a plain dress tucked up very high, short boots, which she probably used in hunting, and a shawl crossed over her bosom; another was wound round her head in the fashion of the peasant women who brought their goods to market on cold winter days. No farmer's wife could be more simply clad, and yet—Eva was forced to admit it—there was something aristocratic in her firm bearing.

Her companions were her father's chaplain and the equerry who had grown grey in his service. Both were trying to dissuade her. The former pointed to a troop of women who were following the chief of police and some city constables, and said warningly: "Those are all wanton queans, whom the law of this city compels to lend their aid in putting out fires. How would it beseem your rank to join these who shame their sex—— No, no! It would be said to-morrow that the ornament of the house of Montfort had——"

"That Countess Cordula had used her hands in extinguishing the fire," she interrupted with gay self-confidence. "Is there any disgrace in that? Must my noble birth debar me from being numbered among those who help their neighbours so far as lies in their power? If any good

is accomplished here, those poor women yonder will make it no worse by their aid. If people here believe that they do, it will give me double pleasure to ennoble it by working with them. Putting out the flames will not degrade me, and will make the women better. So, forward! See how the fire is blazing yonder! Help is needed there and, thank Heaven, I am no weakling. Besides, there are women who want assistance and, to women in peril, the most welcome aid is woman's."

The old equerry, his eyes glittering with tears, nodded assent, and led the way into the street; but the countess, instead of following instantly, glanced back for the page who was to carry the bandages which she had learned to use among her retainers at home. The agile boy did not delay her long; but while his mistress was looking to see that he had forgotten nothing of importance, he perceived at the window Eva, whose beauty had long since fired his young heart, and cast a languishing glance at her. Then Cordula also noticed her and called a pleasant greeting. Eva was on the point of answering in the same tone, when she remembered that Cordula had spoken of Heinz Schorlin in the presence of others as if he were awaiting her in all submission. Anger surged hotly in her breast, and she drew back into the room as if she had not heard the salutation.

The countess perceived it, and shrugged her shoulders pityingly.

Eva, dissatisfied with herself, continued to gaze down into the street long after the crowds of people flocking from the city had concealed Cordula from her eyes. It seemed as though she would never again succeed in anything that would bring contentment. Never had she felt so weak, so ill-tempered, so devoid of self-reliance. Yet she could not, as usual, seek consolation with her saint. There was so much here below to divert her attention.

The roseate glow on the linden had become a crimson glare, the flickering light on the opposite walls a dazzling illumination. The wind, now blowing from the west, bore from St. Klarengasse burning objects which scattered sparks around them—bundles of hay caught by the flames—from the convent barn to the Marienthurm opposite, and into the street. Besides, the noise above and behind, before and below her, grew louder and louder. The ringing of the bells and the blare of trumpets from the steeples continued, and with this constant ringing, pealing, and crashing from above, mingled the high, clear voices of the choir of nuns in the convent, beseeching in fervent litanies the help of their patron saint. True, the singing was often drowned by the noise from the street, for the fire marshals and quartermasters had been informed in time, and watchmen, soldiers

in the pay of the city, men from the hospital, and the abandoned women (required by law to help put out the fires) came in little groups, while bailiffs and servants of the Council, barbers (who were obliged to lend their aid, but whose surgical skill could find little employment here), members of the Council, priests and monks arrived singly. The street also echoed with the trampling of many steeds, for mounted troopers in coats of mail first dashed by to aid the bailiffs in maintaining order, then the inspector of water works, with his chief subordinate, trotted along to St. Klarengasse on the clumsy horses placed at their disposal by the Council in case of fire. He was followed by the millers, with brass fire engines. While their well-fed nags drew on sledges, with little noise, through the mire of the streets now softened by the rain, the heavy wooden water barrels needed in the work of extinguishing the flames, there was a loud rattling and clanking as the carts appeared on which the men from the Public Works building were bringing large and small ladders, hooks and levers, pails and torches, to the scene of the conflagration.

Besides those who were constrained by the law, many others desired to aid the popular Sisters of St. Clare and thereby earn a reward from God. A brewer had furnished his powerful stallions to convey to the scene of action, with their tools, the eight masons whose duty it was to use their skill

in extinguishing the flames. All sorts of people—men and women—followed, yelling and shrieking, to seek their own profit during the work of rescue. But the bailiffs kept a sharp eye on them, and made way when the commander of the German knights, with several companions on whose black mantles the white cross gleamed, appeared on horseback, and at last old Herr Berthold Vorchtel trotted up on his noble grey, which was known to the whole city. He still had a firm seat in the saddle, but his head was bowed, and whoever knew that only one hour before the corpse of his oldest son, slain in a duel, had been brought home, admired the aged magistrate's strength of will. As First Losunger and commander in chief he was the head of the Council, and therefore of the city also. Duty had commanded him to mount his steed, but how pale and haggard was his shrewd face, usually so animated!

Just in front of the Ortlieb mansion the commander of the German knights rode to his side, and Eva saw how warmly he shook him by the hand, as if he desired to show the old man very cordially his deep sympathy in some sore trouble which had assailed him.

Ever since Wolff's betrothal to Els had been announced the Vorchtels had ceased to be on terms of intimacy with the Ortliebs; but old Herr Berthold, though he himself had probably regarded young Eysvogel as his "Ursel's" future husband,

had always treated Eva kindly, and she was not mistaken—tears were glittering on his cheeks in the torchlight. The sight touched the young girl's inmost heart. How eagerly she desired to know what had befallen the Vorchtels, and to give the old man some token of sympathy! What could have caused him so much sorrow? Only a few hours before her father had returned from a gay entertainment at his house. It could scarcely concern Herr Berthold's wife, his daughter Ursula, or either of his two vigorous sons. Perhaps death had only bereft him of some more distant, though beloved relative, yet surely she would have known that, for the Ortliebs were connected by marriage both with the old gentleman and his wife.

Tortured by a presentiment of evil, Eva gazed after him, and also watched for Heinz Schorlin among the people in the street. Must not anxiety for her bring him hither, if he learned how near her house the fire was burning?

Whenever a helmet or knight's *baret* appeared above the crowd she thought that he was coming. Once she believed that she had certainly recognised him, for a tall young man of knightly bearing appeared, not mounted, but on foot, and stopped opposite to the Ortlieb house. That must be he! But when he looked up to her window, the reflection of the fire showed that the man who had made her heart beat so quickly was indeed a young and handsome knight, but by no means

the person for whom she had mistaken him. It was Boemund Altrosen, famed as victor in many a tournament, who when a boy had often been at the house of her uncle, Herr Pfinzing. There was no mistaking his coal-black, waving locks. It was said that the dark-blue sleeve of a woman's robe which he wore on his helmet in the jousts belonged to the Countess von Montfort. She was his lady, for whom he had won so many victories.

Heinz Schorlin had mentioned him at the ball as his friend, and told her that the gallant knight would vainly strive to win the reckless countess. Perhaps he was now looking at the house so intently on Cordula's account. Or had Heinz, his friend, sent him to watch over her while he was possibly detained by the Emperor?

But, no; he had just gone nearer to the house to question a man in the von Montfort livery, and the reply now led him to move on towards the convent.

Were the tears which filled Eva's eyes caused by the smoke that poured from the fire more and more densely into the street, or to disappointment and bitter anguish?

The danger which threatened her aunt and her beloved nuns also increased her excitement. True, the sisters themselves seemed to feel safe, for snatches of their singing were still audible amid the ringing of the bells and the blare of the trumpets, but the fire must have been very hard

to extinguish. This was proved by the bright glow on the linden tree and the shouts of command which, though unintelligible, rose above every other sound.

The street below was becoming less crowded. Most of those who had left their beds to render aid had already reached the scene of the conflagration. Only a few stragglers still passed through the open gate towards the Marienthurm. Among them were horsemen, and Eva's heart again throbbed more quickly, but only for a short time. Heinz Schorlin was far taller than the man who had again deceived her, and his way would hardly have been lighted by two mounted torch bearers. Soon her rosy lips even parted in a smile, for the sturdy little man on the big, strong-boned Vinzgau steed, whom she now saw distinctly, was her dearest relative, her godfather, the kind, shrewd, imperial magistrate, Berthold Pfinzing, the husband of her father's sister, good Aunt Christine.

If he looked up he would tell her about old Herr Vorchtel. Nor did he ride past his darling's house without a glance at her window, and when he saw Eva beckon he ordered the servants to keep back, and stopped behind the chains.

After he had briefly greeted his niece and she had enquired what had befallen the Vorchtels, he asked anxiously: "Then you know nothing yet? And Els—has it been kept from her, too?"

"What, in the name of all the saints?" asked Eva, with increasing alarm.

Then Herr Pfinzing, who saw that the door of the house was open, asked her to come down. Eva was soon standing beside her godfather's big bay, and while patting the smooth neck of the splendid animal he said hurriedly, in a low tone: "It's fortunate that it happened so. You can break it gradually to your sister, child. To-night—— Summon up your courage, for there are things which even a man—— To make the story short, then: To-night Wolff Eysvogel and young Vorchtel quarrelled, or rather Ulrich irritated your Wolff so cruelly that he drew his sword——"

"Wolff!" shrieked Eva, whose hand had already dropped from the horse. "Wolff! He is so terribly strong, and if he drew his sword in anger——"

"He dealt his foe one powerful thrust," replied the imperial magistrate with an expressive gesture. "The sword pierced him through. But I must go on—— Only this one thing more: Ulrich was borne back to his parents as a corpse. And Wolff—— Where is he hiding? May the saints long be the only ones who know! A quarrel with such a result under the Emperor's eyes, now when peace has just been declared throughout the land! Who knows what sentence will be pronounced if the bailiffs show themselves shrewder this time than usual! My office compelled me to set the

pack upon him. That is the reason I am so late. Tell Els as cautiously as possible."

He bowed gallantly and trotted on, but Eva, as if hunted by enemies, rushed up the staircase, threw herself on her knees before the priedieu, and sobbed aloud.

Young Vorchtel had undoubtedly heard of the events in the entry, taunted Wolff with his betrothed bride's nocturnal interview with a knight, and thus roused the strong man to fury. How terrible it all was! How could she bear it! Her thoughtlessness had cost a human life, robbed parents of their son! Through her fault her sister's betrothed husband, whom she also loved, was in danger of being placed under ban, perhaps even of being led to the executioner's block!

She had no thought of any other motive which might have induced the hot-blooded young men to cross swords and, firmly convinced that her luckless letter had drawn Heinz Schorlin to the house and thus led to all these terrible things, she vainly struggled for composure.

Sometimes she beheld in imagination the despairing Els; sometimes the aged Vorchtels, grieving themselves to death; sometimes Wolff, outlawed, hiding like a hunted deer in the recesses of the forest; sometimes the maid, fleeing with her little bundle into the darkness of the night; sometimes the burning convent; and at intervals also Heinz Schorlin, as he knelt before her and

raised his clasped hands with passionate entreaty.

But she repelled every thought of him as a sin, and even repressed the impulse to look out into the street to seek him. Her sole duty now was to pray to her patron saint and the Mother of God in behalf of her sister, whom she had hurled into misfortune, and her poor heart bleeding from such deep wounds; but the consolation which usually followed the mere uplifting of her soul in prayer did not come, and it could not be otherwise, for amid her continual looking into her own heart and listening to what went on around her no real devotion was possible.

Although she constantly made fresh efforts to collect her thoughts, and continued to kneel with clasped hands before the priedieu, not a hoof-beat, not a single loud voice, escaped her ear. Even the alternate deepening and paling of the reflection of the fire, which streamed through the window, attracted her attention, and the ringing of bells and braying of trumpets, which still continued, maintained the agitation in her soul.

Yet prayer was the sole atonement she could make for the wrong she had done her sister; so she did not cease her endeavours to plead for her to the Great Helper above, but her efforts were futile. Yet even when she heard voices close by the house, among which she distinguished Countess Cordula's and—if she was not mistaken—her

father's, she resisted the impulse to rise from her knees.

At last the vain struggle was ended by an interruption from without. After unusually loud voices exclaiming and questioning had reached her from the entry, the door of her chamber suddenly opened and old Martsche looked in. The housekeeper was seeking something; but when she found the devout child on her knees she did not wish to disturb her, and contented herself with the evidence of her eyes. But Eva stopped her, and learned that she was searching for Kätterle, who could neither be found in her room, or anywhere else. Herr Ortlieb had brought Countess von Montfort home severely burned, and there were all sorts of things for the maid to do.

Eva clung shuddering to the back of the priedieu, for the certainty that the unfortunate girl had really fled was like strewing salt on her wounds.

When Martsche left her and Els entered, her excitement had risen to such a pitch that she flung herself before her, as if frantic and, clinging to her knees, heaping self-accusations upon herself with passionate impetuosity, she pleaded, amid her sobs, for pardon and mercy.

Meanwhile Els had been informed by her father of her lover's fatal deed, and as soon as she perceived what tortured her sister she relieved her, with loving words of explanation, from the re-

proach of being the cause of this misfortune also, for the quarrel had taken place so early that no tidings of the meeting in the entry could have reached young Vorchtel when he became involved in the fray with Wolff.

Nor was it solely to soothe Eva that she assured her that, deeply as she mourned the death of the hapless Ulrich and his parents' grief, Wolff's deed could not diminish either her love or her hope of becoming his.

Eva listened to this statement with sparkling eyes. The love in her sister's heart was as immovably firm as the ancient stones of her native stronghold, which defied every storm, and on which even the destroying, kindling lightning could inflict no injury. This made her doubly dear, and from the depths of dull despair her soul, ever prone to soar upwards, rose swiftly to the heights of hopeful exaltation.

When Els at last entreated her to go to rest without her, she willingly consented, for her mother was comfortable, and Sister Renata was watching at her bedside.

Eva kept her promise, after Els, who wanted to see the Countess von Montfort, had satisfied her concerning the welfare of the nuns and promised to go to rest herself as soon as possible.

The stopping of the alarm bells proved that the fire was under control. Even its reflection had disappeared, but the eastern sky was begin-

ning to be suffused with a faint tinge of rose colour.

When her sister left her Eva herself drew the curtains before the window, and sleep soon ended her thoughts and yearnings, her grief and her hope.

CHAPTER XIV.

Countess Cordula von Montfort's room faced the east and looked out into the garden. The sun of the June morning had just risen, filling it with cheerful light.

The invalid's maid had wished to deny Els admittance, but the countess called eagerly to her, and then ordered the windows to be opened, because she never felt comfortable unless it was light around her and she could breathe God's pure air.

The morning breeze bore the smoke which still rose from the fire in another direction, and thus a refreshing air really entered the room from the garden, for the thunderstorm had refreshed all nature, and flower beds and grass, bush and tree, exhaled a fresh odour of earth and leafage which it was a delight to breathe.

The leech Otto, to whom the severely wounded Ulrich Vorchtel had been carried, had just left the countess. The burns on her hands and arms had been bandaged—nay, the old gentleman had cut out the scorched portions of her tresses with his own hand. Cordula's energetic action had made

the famous surgeon deem her worthy of such care. He had also advised her to seek the nursing of the oldest daughter of her host, whose invalid wife he was attending, and she had gladly assented; for Els had attracted her from their first meeting, and she was accustomed to begin the day at sunrise.

"How does it happen that you neither weep nor even hang your head after all the sorrow which last night brought you?" asked Cordula, as the Nuremberg maiden sat down beside her bed. "You are a stranger to the Swiss knight, and when we surprised you with him you had not come to a meeting—I know that full well. But if so true and warm a love unites you to young Eysvogel, how does it happen that your joyous courage is so little damped by his father's denial and his own unhappy deed, which at this time could scarcely escape punishment? You do not seem frivolous, and yet——"

"Yet," replied Els with a pleasant smile, "many things have made a deeper impression. We are not all alike, Countess, yet there is much in your nature which must render it easy for you to understand me; for, Countess——"

"Call me Cordula," interrupted the girl in a tone of friendly entreaty. "Why should I deny that I am fond of you? and at the risk of making you vain, I will betray——"

"Well?" asked Els eagerly.

"That the splendid old leech described you to

me exactly as I had imagined you," was the reply. "You were one of those, he said, whose mere presence beside a sick-bed was as good as medicine, and so you are; and, dear Jungfrau Els, this salutary medicine benefits me."

"If I am to dispense with the 'Countess,'" replied the other, "you must spare me the 'Jungfrau.' Nursing you will give me all the more pleasure on account of the warm gratitude——"

"Never mind that," interrupted Cordula. "But please look at the bandage, beneath which the flesh burns and aches more than is necessary, and then go on with your explanation."

Els examined the countess's arm, and then applied a household remedy whose use she had learned from the wife of Herr Pfinzing, her Aunt Christine, who was familiar with the healing art. It relieved the pain, and when Cordula told her so, Els went on with her explanation. "When all these blows fell upon me, they at first seemed, indeed, unprecedented and scarcely possible to endure. When afterwards my Wolff's unhappy deed was added, I felt as though I were standing in a dense, dark mist, where each step forwards must lead me into a stifling morass or over a precipice. Then I began to reflect upon what had happened, as is my custom; I separated, in my thoughts, the evil menacing in the future from the good, and had scarcely made a little progress in this way when morass and abyss lost their terrors; both, I

found, could be left to take care of themselves, since neither Wolff nor I lack love and good will, and we possess some degree of prudence and caution."

"Yes, this thinking and considering!" cried the countess, with a faint sigh. "It succeeds in my case, too, only, unluckily, I usually don't begin until it is too late and the folly has been committed."

"Then, henceforth, you must reverse the process," answered Els cheerily. But directly after she changed her tone, which sounded serious enough as she added: "The sorrow of the poor Vorchtels and the grief my betrothed husband must endure, because the dead man was once a dear friend, certainly casts a dark shadow upon many things; but you, who love the chase, must surely be familiar with the misty autumn mornings to which I allude. Everything, far and near, is covered by a thick veil, yet one feels that there is bright sunshine behind it. Suddenly the mist scatters——"

"And mountain and forest, land and water, lie before us in the radiant sunlight!" cried the countess. "How well I know such scenes! And how I should rejoice if a favourable wind would sweep the grey mist away for you right speedily! Only —indeed, I am not disposed to look on the dark side—only, perhaps you do not know how resolute the Emperor is that the peace of the country shall

be maintained. If your lover allowed himself to be carried away——"

"This was not the first time," Els eagerly interrupted, "that young Vorchtel tried to anger him in the presence of others; and he believed that he was justified in bearing a grudge against his former friend—it was considered a settled thing that Wolff and his sister Ursula were to marry."

"Until," Cordula broke in, "he gazed into your bright eyes."

"How could you know that?" asked Els in confusion.

"Because, in love and hate, as well as in reckoning, two and three follow one," laughed the countess. "As for your Wolff, in particular, I will gladly believe, with you, that he can succeed in clearing himself before the judges. But with regard to old Eysvogel, who looks as though, if he met our dear Lord Himself, he would think first which of the two was the richer, your future brother-in-law Siebenburg, that disagreeable 'Mustache,' and his poor wife, who sits at home grieving over her dissolute husband—what gratitude you can expect from such kindred——"

"None," replied Els sadly. Yet a mischievous smile hovered around her lips as, bending over the invalid, she added in a whisper: "But the good I expect from all the evil is, that we and the Eysvogels will be separated as if by wall and moat. They will never cross them, but Wolff would find

the way back to me, though we were parted by an ocean, and mountains towering to the sky divided us."

"This confidence, indeed, maintains the courage," said the countess, and with a faint sigh she added: "Whatever evil may befall you, many might envy you."

"Then love has conquered you also?" Els began; but Cordula answered evasively:

"Let that pass, dear Jungfrau. Perhaps love treats me as a mother deals with a froward child, because I asked too much of her. My life has become an endless battue. Much game of all kinds is thus driven out to be shot, but the sportsman finds true pleasure only in tracking the single heathcock, the solitary chamois. Yet, no," and in her eagerness she flung her bandaged hand so high into the air that she groaned with pain and was forced to keep silence. When able to speak once more, still tortured by severe suffering, she exclaimed angrily: "No, I want neither driving nor stalking. What do I care for the prey? I am a woman, too. I would fain be the poor persecuted game, which the hunter pursues at the risk of breaking his bones and neck. It must be delightful; one would willingly bear the pain of a wound for its sake. I don't mean these pitiful burns, but a deep and deadly one."

"You ought to have spared yourself these," said Els in a tone of affectionate warning. "Con-

sider what you are to your father, and how your suffering pains him! To risk a precious human life for the sake of a stupid brute——"

"They call it a sin, I know," Cordula burst forth. "And yet I would commit the same to-morrow at the risk of again—— Oh, you cautious city people, you maidens with snow-white hands! What do you know of a girl like me? You cannot even imagine what my child life was; and yet it is told in a single word—motherless! I was never permitted to see her, to hear her dear, warning voice. She paid with her own life for giving me mine. My father? How kind he is! He meant to supply his dead wife's place by anticipating my every wish. Had I desired to feast my eyes on the castle in flames, it would, perhaps, now lie in ashes. So I became what I am. True—and this is something—I grew to be at least *one* person's joy—his. No, no, at home there are others also, though they dwell in wretched hovels, who would gladly welcome me back. But except these, who will ask about the reckless countess? I myself do not care to linger long when the mirror shows me my image. Do you wish to know what this has to do with the fire? Much; for otherwise I should scarcely have been wounded. The lightning had struck only the convent barn; the cow stable, when we arrived, was still safe, but the flames soon reached it also. Neither the nuns nor the men had thought of driving the cattle out. Poor city cattle! In the

country the animals have more friendly care. When the work of rescue was at last commenced the cows naturally refused to leave their old home. Some prudent person had torn the door off the hinges that they might not stifle. Just in front of it stood a pretty red cow with a white star on her face. A calf was by her side, and the mother had already sunk on her knees and was licking it in mortal terror. I pitied the poor thing, and as Boemond Altrosen, the black-haired knight who entered your house with the rest after the ride to Kadolzburg, had just come there, I told him to save the calf. Of course he obeyed my wish, and as it struggled he dragged it out of the stable with his strong arms. The building was already blazing, and the thatched roof threatened to fall in. Just at that moment the old cow looked at me so piteously and uttered such a mournful bellow that it touched me to the heart. My eyes rested on the calf, and a voice within whispered that it would be motherless, like me, and miss during the first part of its life God's best gift. But since, as you have heard, I act before I think, I went myself—I no longer know how—into the burning stable. It was hard to breathe in the dense smoke, and fiery sparks scorched my shawl and my hair, but I was conscious of one thought: You must save the helpless little creature's mother! So I called and lured her, as I do at home, where all the cows are fond of me, but it was useless; and just as I perceived this the

thatched roof fell in, and I should probably have perished had not Altrosen this time carried my own by no means light figure out of the stable instead of the calf."

"And you?" asked Els eagerly.

"I submitted," replied the countess.

"No, no," urged Els. "Your heart throbbed faster with grateful joy, for you saw the desire of your soul fulfilled. A hunter, and one of the noblest of them all, risked his life in the pursuit of your love. O Countess Cordula, I remember that knight well, and if the dark-blue sleeve which he wore on his helm in the tournament was yours——"

"I believe it was," Cordula interrupted indifferently. "But, what was of more importance, when I opened my eyes again the cow was standing outside, licking her recovered calf."

"And the knight?" asked Els. "Whoever so heroically risks his life for his lady's wish should be sure of her gratitude."

"Boemund can rely on that," said Cordula positively. "At least, what he did this time for my sake weighs more heavily in the scale than the lances he has broken, his love songs, or the mute language of his longing eyes. Those are shafts which do not pierce my heart. How reproachfully you look at me! Let him take lessons from his friend Heinz Schorlin, and he may improve. Yes, the Swiss knight! He would be the man for me, spite of your involuntary meeting with him and your de-

vout sister, for whom he forgot every one else, and me also, in the dancing hall. O Jungfrau Els, I have the hunter's eyes, which are keen-sighted! For his sake your beautiful Eva, with her saintly gaze, might easily forget to pray. It was not you, but she, who drew him to-night to your house. Had this thought entered my head downstairs in the entry I should probably, to be honest, have omitted my little fairy tale and let matters take their course. St. Clare ought to have protected her future votary. Besides, it pleases the arrogant little lady to show me as plainly as possible, on every occasion, that I am a horror to her. Let those who will accept such insults. My Christianity does not go far enough to offer her the right cheek too. And shall I tell you something? To spoil her game, I should be capable, in spite of all the life preservers in the world, of binding Schorlin to me in good earnest."

"Do not!" pleaded Els, raising her clasped hands beseechingly, and added, as if in explanation: "For the noble Boemund Altrosen's sake, do not."

"To promise that, my darling, is beyond my power," replied Cordula coolly, "because I myself do not know what I may do or leave undone tomorrow or the day after. I am like a beech leaf on the stream. Let us see where the current will carry it. It is certain," and she looked at her bandaged hands, "that my greatest beauty, my round arms, are disfigured. Scars adorn a man; on a

woman they are ugly and repulsive. At a dance they can be hidden under tight sleeves, but how hot that would be in the *Schwäbeln* and *Rai!* So I had better keep away from these foolish gaieties in future. A calf turns a countess out of a ballroom! What do you think of that? New things often happen."

Here she was interrupted; the housekeeper called Els. Sir Seitz Siebenburg, spite of the untimely hour, had come to speak to her about an important matter. Her father had gone to rest and sleep. The knight also enquired sympathisingly about Countess von Montfort and presented his respects.

"Of which I can make no use!" cried Cordula angrily. "Tell him so, Martsche."

As the housekeeper withdrew she exclaimed impatiently: "How it burns! The heat would be enough to convert the rescued calf into an appetising roast. I wish I could sleep off the pain of my foolish prank! The sunlight is beginning to be troublesome. I cannot bear it; it is blinding. Draw the curtain over the window."

Cordula's own maid hastened to obey the order. Els helped the countess turn on her pillows, and as in doing so she touched her arm, the sufferer cried angrily: "Who cares what hurts me? Not even you!"

Here she paused. The pleading glance which Els had cast at her must have pierced her soft

heart, for her bosom suddenly heaved violently and, struggling to repress her sobs, she gasped: "I know you mean kindly, but I am not made of stone or iron either. I want to be alone and go to sleep."

She closed her eyes as she spoke and, when Els bent to kiss her, tears bedewed her cheeks.

Soon after Els went down into the entry to meet her lover's brother-in-law. He had refused to enter the empty sitting-room. The Countess von Montfort's unfriendly dismissal had vexed him sorely, yet it made no lasting impression. Other events had forced into the background the bitter attack of Cordula, for whom he had never felt any genuine regard.

The experiences of the last few hours had converted the carefully bedizened gallant into a coarse fellow, whose outward appearance bore visible tokens of his mental depravity. The faultlessly cut garment was pushed awry on his powerful limbs and soiled on the breast with wine stains. The closely fitting steel chain armour, in which he had ridden out, now hung in large folds upon his powerful frame. The long mustache, which usually curled so arrogantly upwards, now drooped damp and limp over his mouth and chin, and his long reddish hair fell in dishevelled locks around his bloated face. His blue eyes, which usually sparkled so brightly, now looked dull and bleared, and there were white spots on his copper-coloured cheeks.

Since Countess Cordula gave him the insulting message to his wife he had undergone more than he usually experienced in the course of years.

"An accursed night!" he had exclaimed, in reply to the housekeeper's question concerning the cause of his disordered appearance.

Els, too, was startled by his looks and the hoarse sound of his voice. Nay, she even drew back from him, for his wandering glance made her fear that he was intoxicated.

Only a short time before, it is true, he had scarcely been able to stand erect, but the terrible news which had assailed him had quickly sobered him.

He had come at this unwontedly early hour to enquire whether the Ortliebs had heard anything of his brother-in-law Wolff. There was not a word of allusion to the broken betrothal.

In return for the promise that she would let the Eysvogels know as soon as she received any tidings of her lover, which Els gave unasked, Siebenburg, who had always treated her repellently or indifferently, thanked her so humbly that she was surprised. She did not know how to interpret it; nay, she anticipated nothing good when, with urgent cordiality, he entreated her to forget the unpleasant events of the preceding night, which she must attribute to a sudden fit of anger on Herr Casper's part. She was far too dear to all the members of the family for them to give her up so

easily. What had occurred—she must admit that herself—might have induced even her best friend to misunderstand it. For one brief moment he, too, had been tempted to doubt her innocence. If she knew old Eysvogel's terrible situation she would certainly do everything in her power to persuade her father to receive him that morning, or—which would be still better—go to his office. The weal and woe of many persons were at stake, her own above all, since, as Wolff's betrothed bride, she belonged to him inseparably.

"Even without the ring?" interrupted Els bitterly; and when Siebenburg eagerly lamented that he had not brought it back, she answered proudly: "Don't trouble yourself, Sir Seitz! I need this sacred pledge as little as the man who still wears *mine*. Tell your kinsfolk so. I will inform my father of Herr Casper's wish; he is asleep now. Shall I guess aright in believing that the other disasters which have overtaken you are connected with the waggon trains Wolff so anxiously expected?"

Siebenburg, twirling his cap in confusion, assented to her question, adding that he knew nothing except that they were lost and, after repeating his entreaty that she would accomplish a meeting between the two old gentlemen, left her.

It would indeed have been painful for him to talk with Els, for a messenger had brought tidings that the waggons had been attacked and robbed,

and the perpetrators of the deed were his own brothers and their cousin and accomplice Absbach.

True, Seitz himself had had no share in the assault, yet he did not feel wholly blameless for what had occurred, since over the wine and cards he had boasted, in the presence of the robbers, of the costly wares which his father-in-law was expecting, and mentioned the road they would take.

Seitz Siebenburg's conscience was also burdened with something quite different.

Vexed and irritated by the countess's insulting rebuff, he had gone to the Green Shield to forget his annoyance at the gaming table in the Duke of Pomerania's quarters. He had fared ill. There was no lack of fiery Rhine wine supplied by the generous host; the sultry atmosphere caused by the rising thunderstorm increased his thirst and, half intoxicated, and incensed by the luck of Heinz Schorlin, in whom he saw the preferred lover of the lady who had so suddenly withdrawn her favour, he had been led on to stakes of unprecedented amount. At last he risked the lands, castle, and village which he possessed in Hersbruck as his wife's dower. Moreover, he was aware of having said things which, though he could not recall them to memory in detail, had roused the indignation of many of those who were present. The remarks referred principally to the Ortlieb sisters.

Amid the wild uproar prevailing around the gaming table that night the duel which had cost

young Vorchtel his life was not mentioned until the last dice had been thrown. In the discussion the victor's betrothed bride had been named, and Siebenburg clearly remembered that he had spoken of the breaking of his brother-in-law's engagement, and connected it with accusations which involved him in a quarrel with several of the guests, among them Heinz Schorlin.

Similar occurrences were frequent, and he was brave, strong, and skilful enough to cope with any one, even the dreaded Swiss; only he was vexed and troubled because he had disputed with the man to whom he had lost his property. Besides, his father-in-law had so earnestly enjoined it upon him to put no obstacle in the way of his desire to make peace with the Ortliebs that he was obliged to bow his stiff neck to them.

The arrogant knight's position was critical, and real inward dignity was unknown to him. Yet he would rather have been dragged with his brothers to the executioner's block than humbled himself before the Swiss. But he must talk with him for the sake of his twin sons, whose heritage he had so shamefully gambled away. True, the utmost he intended was the confession that, while intoxicated, he had staked his property at the gaming table and said things which he regretted. Heinz Schorlin's generosity was well known. Perhaps he might offer some acceptable arrangement ere the notary conveyed his estate to him. He did not

yet feel that he could stoop so low as to receive a gift from this young upstart.

If his father-in-law, who supported him, was really ruined, as he had just asserted, he would indeed be plunged into beggary, with his wife, whose stately figure constantly rose before him, with a look of mute reproach, his beautiful twin boys, and his load of debt.

The gigantic man felt physically crushed by the terrible blows of fate which had fallen upon him during this last wakeful night. He would fain have gone to the nearest tavern and there left it to the wine to bring forgetfulness. To drink, drink constantly, and in the intervals sleep with his head resting on his arms, seemed the most tempting prospect. But he was obliged to return to the Eysvogels. There was too much at stake. Besides, he longed to see the twins who resembled him so closely, and of whom Countess Cordula had said that she hoped they would not be like their father.

CHAPTER XV.

THE city gates were already open. Peasants and peasant women bringing vegetables and other farm produce to market thronged the streets, wains loaded with grain or charcoal rumbled along, and herds of cattle and swine, laden donkeys, the little carts of the farmers and bee keepers conveying milk and honey to the city, passed over the dyke, which was still softened by the rain of the preceding night.

The thunderstorm had cooled the air, but the rays of the morning sun were already scorching. A few heavy little clouds were darkly relieved against the blue sky, and a peasant, driving two sucking pigs before him, called to another, who was carrying a goose under each arm, that the sun was drawing water, and thundershowers seldom came singly.

Yet the city looked pleasant enough in the freshness of early June. The maidservants who were opening the shutters glanced gaily out into the streets, and arranged the flowers in front of

the windows or bowed reverently as a priest passed by on his way to mass. The barefooted Capuchin, with his long beard, beckoned to the cook or the tradesman's wife and, as she put something into his beggar's sack and he thanked her kindly with some pious axiom, she felt as if she herself and all her household had gained a right to the blessing of Heaven for that day, and cheerily continued her work.

The brass counter in the low, broad bow window of the baker's house glittered brightly, and the pale apprentice wiped the flour from his face and gave his master's rosy-cheeked daughter fresh warm cakes to set on the shining shelves. The barber's nimble apprentice hung the towel and basin at the door, while his master, wearied by the wine-bibbing and talk at the tavern or his labour at the fire, was still asleep. His active wife had risen before him, strewed the shop with fresh sand, and renewed the goldfinch's food.

The workshops and stores were adorned with birch branches, and the young daughters of the burghers, in becoming caps, the maid servants and apprentices, who were going to market with baskets on their arms, wore a flower or something green on their breasts or in their caps.

The first notes of the bells, pealing solemnly, were summoning worshippers to mass, the birds were singing in the garden, and the cocks were crowing in the yards of the houses. The animals

passing in the street lowed, grunted, and cackled merrily in the dawn of the young day.

Gay young men, travelling students who had sought cheap quarters in the country, now entered the city with a merry song on their lips just shaded by the first down of manhood, and when a maiden met them she lowered her eyes modestly before the riotous fellows.

The terrors of the frightful thunderstorm seemed forgotten. Nuremberg looked gladsome; a carpet hung from many a bow-window, and flags and streamers fluttered from roofs and balconies to honour the distinguished guests. Many signs of their presence were visible, squires and equerries, in their masters' colours, were riding spirited horses, and a few knights who loved early rising were already in the saddle, their shining helmets and coats of mail flashing brightly in the sunshine.

The gigantic figure of Sir Seitz Siebenburg moved with drooping head through the budding joy of this June day towards the Eysvogel dwelling.

His gloomy, haggard face and disordered attire made two neatly dressed young shoemaker's apprentices, on their way to their work, nudge each other and look keenly at him.

"I'd rather meet him here in broad daylight among houses and people than in the dusk on the highway," remarked one of them.

"There's no danger," replied the other. "He

wears the curb now. He moved from the robber nest into the rich Eysvogel house opposite. That's Herr Casper's son-in-law. But such people can never let other folks' property alone. Only here they work in another way. The shoes he wears were made in our workshop, but the master still whistles for his pay, and he owes everybody—the tailor, the lacemaker, the armourer, the girdle-maker, and the goldsmith. If an apprentice reminds him of the debt, let him beware of bruises."

"The Emperor Rudolph ought to issue an edict against such injustice!" wrathfully exclaimed the other and taller youth, the handsome son of a master of the craft from Weissenburg on the Sand, who expected soon to take his father's place. "Up at Castle Graufels, which is saddled on our little town, master and man would be going barefoot but for us; yet for three years we haven't seen so much as a penny of his, though my father says times have already improved, since the Hapsburg, as a just man——"

"Things have not been so bad here for a long while, the saints be praised!" his companion broke in. "Siebenburg, or some of his wife's rich kindred, will at last be compelled to settle matters. We have the law and the Honourable Council to attend to that. Look up! Yonder stately old house gave its daughter to the penniless knight. She is one of our customers too; a handsome woman, and not one of the worst either. But her

mother, who was born a countess—if the shoe doesn't make a foot small which Nature created big, there's such an outcry! True, the old woman, her mother, is worse still; she scolds and screams. But look up at the bow window. There she stands. I'm only a poor brewer's son, but before I——"

"You don't say so!" the other interrupted. "Have you seen the owl in the cage in front of the guardhouse at the gate of the hospital? It is her living image; and how her chin projects and moves up and down, as though she were chewing leather!"

"And yet," said the other, as if insisting upon something difficult to believe, "and yet the old woman is a real countess."

The Weissenburg apprentice expressed his astonishment with another: "You don't say so!" but as he spoke he grasped his companion's arm, adding earnestly: "Let us go. That ugly old woman just looked at me, and if it wasn't the evil eye—— I shall go straight to the church and drive away the misfortune with holy water."

"Come, then," answered the Nuremberg youth, but continued thoughtfully: "Yet my master's grandmother, a woman of eighty, is probably older than the one up there, but nobody could imagine a kinder, pleasanter dame. When she looks approvingly at one it seems as if the dear God's blessing were shining from two little windows."

"That's just like my grandmother at home!" exclaimed the Weissenburg apprentice with sparkling eyes.

Turning from the Eysvogel mansion as they spoke, they pursued their way.

Siebenburg had overtaken the apprentices, but ere crossing the threshold of the house which was now his home he stopped before it.

It might, perhaps, be called the largest and handsomest in Nuremberg; but it was only a wide two-story structure, though the roof had been adorned with battlements and the sides with a small bow-windowed turret. At the second story a bracket, bearing an image of the Madonna, had been built out on one side, and on the other the bow window from which old Countess Rotterbach had looked down into the street.

The coat of arms was very striking and wholly out of harmony with the simplicity of the rest of the building. Its showy splendour, visible for a long distance, occupied the wide space between the door of the house and the windows of the upper story. The escutcheon of the noble family from which Rosalinde, Herr Casper's wife, had descended rested against the shield bearing the birds. The Rotterbach supporters, a nude man and a bear standing on its hind legs, rose on both sides of the double escutcheon, and the stone cutter had surmounted the Eysvogel helmet with a count's coronet.

This elaborate decoration of the ancient patrician house had become one of the sights of the city, and had often made Herr Casper, at the Honourable Council and elsewhere, clench his fist under his mantle, for it had drawn open censure and bitter mockery upon the arrogant man, but his desire to have it replaced by a more modest one had been baffled by the opposition of the women of his family. They had had it put up, and would not permit any one to touch it, though Wolff, after his return from Italy, had strenuously urged its removal.

It had brought the Eysvogels no good fortune, for on the day of its completion the business received its first serious blow, and it also served to injure the commercial house externally in a very obvious manner. Whereas formerly many wares which needed to be kept dry had been hoisted from the outer door and the street to the spacious attic, this was now prevented by the projecting figures of the nude men and the bears. Therefore it became necessary to hoist the goods to be stored in the attic from the courtyard, which caused delay and hindrances of many kinds. Various expedients had been suggested, but the women opposed them all, for they were glad that the ugly casks and bales no longer found their way to the garret past their windows, and it also gratified their arrogance that they were no longer visible from the street.

Siebenburg now looked up at the huge escutcheon and recalled the day when, after having been specially favoured by Isabella Eysvogel at a dance in the Town Hall, he had paused in the same place. A long line of laden waggons had just stopped in front of the door surmounted by the double escutcheon, and if he had previously hesitated whether to profit by the favour of Isabella, whose haughty majesty, which attracted him, also inspired him with a faint sense of uneasiness, he was now convinced how foolish it would be not to forge the iron which seemed aglow in his favour. What riches the menservants were carrying into the vaulted entry, which was twice as large as the one in the Orlieb mansion! Besides, the escutcheon with the count's coronet had given the knight assurance that he would have no cause to be ashamed, in an assembly of his peers, of his alliance with the Nuremberg maiden. Isabella's hand could undoubtedly free him from the oppressive burden of his debts, and she was certainly a magnificent woman! How well, too, her tall figure would suit him and the Siebenburgs, whose name was said to be derived from the seven feet of stature which some of them measured!

Now he again remembered the hour when she had laid her slender hand in his. For a brief period he had been really happy; his heart had not felt so light since early childhood, though at first he had ventured to confess only one half his load

of debt to his father-in-law. He had even assumed fresh obligations to relieve his brothers from their most pressing cares. They had attended his brilliant wedding, and it had flattered his vanity to show them what he could accomplish as the wealthy Eysvogel's son-in-law.

But how quickly all this had changed! He had learned that, besides the woman who had given him her heart and inspired him with a passion hitherto unknown, he had wedded two others.

Now, as the image of old Countess Rotterbach, Isabella's grandmother, forced itself upon his mind, he unconsciously knit his brow. He had not heard her say much, but with every word she bestowed upon him he was forced to accept something bitter. She rarely left her place in the armchair in the bow window in the sitting-room, but it seemed as if her little eyes possessed the power of piercing walls and doors, for she knew everything that concerned him, even his greatest secrets, which he believed he had carefully concealed. More on her account than on that of his mother-in-law, who did nothing except what the former commanded, he had repeatedly tried to remove with his wife to the estate of Tannenreuth, which had been assigned to him on the day of the marriage, that its revenues might support the young couple, but the mother and grandmother detained his wife, and their wishes were more to her than his. Perhaps, however, he might have induced her to go with him had not

his father-in-law made his debts a snare, which he drew whenever it was necessary to stifle his wishes, and he, too, wanted to retain his daughter at home.

Since Wolff's return from Italy he had become aware that the stream of gold from the Eysvogel coffers flowed more sparingly, or even failed altogether to satisfy his extravagant tastes. Therefore his relations with his brother-in-law, whose prudent caution he considered avarice, and whose earnest protests against his often unprecedented demands frequently roused his ire, became more and more unfriendly.

The inmates of the Eysvogel house rendered his home unendurable, and from the experiences of his bachelor days he knew only too well where mirth reigned in Nuremberg. So he became a rare guest at the Eysvogels, and when Isabella found herself neglected and deceived, she made him feel her resentment in her own haughty and —as soon as she deemed herself injured—harsh manner.

At first her displeasure troubled him sorely, but the ardent passion which had absorbed him during the early days of their marriage had died out, and only flamed up with its old fervour occasionally; but at such times the haughty, neglected wife repulsed him with insulting severity.

Yet she had never permitted any one to disparage her husband behind his back. True, Sie-

benburg did not know this, but he perceived more and more plainly that both the Eysvogels, father and son, were oppressed by some grave anxiety, and that the sums which Wolff now paid him no longer sufficed to hold his creditors in check. He was not accustomed to impose any restraint upon himself, and thus it soon became known throughout the city that he did not live at peace with his wife and her family.

Yet five weeks ago matters had appeared to improve. The birth of the twins had brought something new into his life, which drew him nearer to Isabella.

The children at first seemed to him two lovely miracles. Both boys, both exactly like him. When they were brought to him on their white, lace-trimmed pillows, his heart had swelled with joy, and it was his greatest delight to gaze at them.

This was the natural result.

He, the stalwart Siebenburg, had not become the father of one ordinary boy, but of two little knights at once. When he returned home—even if his feet were unsteady—his first visit was to them, and he had often felt that he was far too poor and insignificant to thank his neglected wife aright for so precious a gift.

Whenever this feeling took possession of him he expressed his love to Isabella with tender humility; while she, who had bestowed her hand upon

him solely from love, forgot all her wrongs, and her heart throbbed faster with grateful joy when she saw him, with fatherly pride, carry the twins about with bent knees, as if their weight was too heavy for his giant arms to bear.

The second week after their birth Isabella fell slightly ill. Her mother and grandmother undertook the nursing, and as the husband found them both with the twins whenever he came to see the infants and their mother, the sick-room grew distasteful to him. Again, as before their birth, he sought compensation outside of the house for the annoyance caused by the women at home; but the memory of the little boys haunted him, and when he met his companions at the tavern he invited them to drink the children's health in the host's best wine.

So life went on until the Reichstag brought the von Montforts, whom he had met at a tournament in Augsburg, to the city of Nuremberg.

Mirth reigned wherever Countess Cordula appeared, and Siebenburg needed amusement and joined the train of her admirers—with what evil result he now clearly perceived for the first time.

He again stood before the stately dwelling where he had hoped to find luxury and wealth, but where his heart now throbbed more anxiously than those of his kinsmen had formerly done in the impoverished castle of his father, who had died so long ago.

The Eysvogel dwelling, with its showy escutcheon above the door, was threatened by want, and hand in hand with it, he knew, the most hideous of all her children—disgrace.

Now he also remembered what he himself had done to increase the peril menacing the ancient commercial house. Perhaps the old man within was relying upon the estate of Tannenreuth, which he had assigned to him, to protect some post upon which much depended, and he had gambled it away. This must now be confessed, and also the amount of his own debts.

An unpleasant task confronted him but, humiliating and harassing as was the interview awaiting him beyond the threshold before which he still lingered, at least he would not find Wolff there. This seemed a boon, since for the first time he would have felt himself in the wrong in the presence of his unloved brother-in-law. Even the burden of his debts weighed less heavily on his conscience than the irritating words with which he had induced his father-in-law to break off Wolff's betrothal to Els Ortlieb. The act was base and malicious. Greatly as he had erred, he had never before been guilty of such a deed, and with a curse upon himself on his bearded lips he approached the door; but when half way to it he stopped again and looked up to the second-story windows behind which the twins slept. With what delight he had always thought of them! But this time the

recollection of the little boys was spoiled by Countess Cordula's message to his wife to rear them so that they would not be like him, their father.

An evil wish! And yet the warmest love could have devised no better one in behalf of the true welfare of the boys.

He told himself so as he passed beneath the escutcheon through the heavy open door with its iron ornaments. He was expected, the steward told him, but he arched his broad breast as if preparing for a wrestling match, pulled his mustache still longer, and went up the stairs.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE spacious, lofty sitting-room which Seitz Siebenburg entered looked very magnificent. Gay Flanders tapestries hung on the walls. The ceiling was slightly vaulted, and in the centre of each mesh of the net designed upon it glittered a richly gilded kingfisher from the family coat of arms. Bear and leopard skins lay on the cushions, and upon the shelf which surrounded three sides of the apartment stood costly vases, gold and silver utensils, Venetian mirrors and goblets. The chairs and furniture were made of rare woods inlaid with ebony and mother of pearl, brought by way of Genoa from Moorish Spain. In the bow window jutting out into the street, where the old grandmother sat in her armchair, two green and yellow parrots on brass perches interrupted the conversation, whenever it grew louder, with the shrill screams of their ugly voices.

Siebenburg found all the family except Wolff and the twins. His wife was half sitting, half reclining, on a divan. When Seitz entered she raised her head from the white arm on which it had rested,

turned her oval face with its regular features towards him, and gathered up the fair locks which, released from their braids, hung around her in long, thick tresses. Her eyes showed that she had been weeping violently, and as her husband approached she again sobbed painfully.

Her grandmother seemed annoyed by her lamentations for, pointing to Isabella's tears, she exclaimed sharply, glancing angrily at Siebenburg: "It's a pity for every one of them!"

The knight's blood boiled at the words, but they strengthened his courage. He felt relieved from any consideration for these people, not one of whom, except the poor woman shedding such burning tears, had given him occasion to return love for love. Had they flowed only for the lost wealth, and not for him and the grief he caused Isabella, they would not have seemed "a pity" to the old countess.

Siebenburg's breath came quicker.

The gratitude he owed his father-in-law certainly did not outweigh the humiliations with which he, his weak wife, and ill-natured mother-in-law had embittered his existence.

Even now the old gentleman barely vouchsafed him a greeting. After he had asked about his son, called himself a ruined man, and upbraided the knight with insulting harshness because his brothers—the news had been brought to him a short time before—were the robbers who had seized his

goods, and the old countess had chimed in with the exclamation, "They are all just fit for the executioner's block!" Seitz could restrain himself no longer; nay, it gave him actual pleasure to show these hated people what he had done, on his part, to add to their embarrassments. He was no orator, but now resentment loosened his tongue, and with swift, scornful words he told Herr Casper that, as the son-in-law of a house which liked to represent itself as immensely rich, he had borrowed from others what—he was justified in believing it—had been withheld through parsimony. Besides, his debts were small in comparison with the vast sums Herr Casper had lavished in maintaining the impoverished estates of the Rotterbach kindred. Like every knight whose own home was not pleasant, he sometimes gambled; and when, yesterday, ill luck pursued him and he lost the estate of Tannenreuth, he sincerely regretted the disaster, but it could not be helped.

Terror and rage had sealed the old countess's lips, but now they parted in the hoarse cry: "You deserve the wheel and the gallows, not the honourable block!" and her daughter, Rosalinde Eysvogel, repeated in a tone of sorrowful lamentation, "Yes, the wheel and the gallows."

A scornful laugh from Siebenburg greeted the threat, but when Herr Casper, white as death and barely able to control his voice, asked whether this incredible confession was merely intended to

frighten the women, and the knight assured him of the contrary, he groaned aloud: "Then the old house must succumb to disgraceful ruin."

Years of life spent together may inspire and increase aversion instead of love, but they undoubtedly produce a certain community of existence. The bitter anguish of his aged household companion, the father of his wife, to whom bonds of love still unsevered united him, touched even Seitz Siebenburg. Besides, nothing moves the heart more quickly than the grief of a proud, stern man. Herr Casper's confession did not make him dearer to the knight, but it induced him to drop the irritating tone which he had assumed, and in an altered voice he begged him not to give up his cause as lost without resistance. For his daughter's sake old Herr Ortlieb must lend his aid. Els, with whom he had just spoken, would cling firmly to Wolff, and try to induce her father to do all that was possible for her lover's house. He would endeavour to settle with his own creditors himself. His sharp sword and strong arm would be welcome everywhere, and the booty he won—— Here he was interrupted by the grandmother's query in a tone of cutting contempt: "Booty? On the highway, do you mean?"

Once more the attack from the hostile old woman rendered the knight's decision easier, for, struggling not to give way to his anger, he answered: "Rather, I think, in the Holy Land, in

the war against the infidel Saracens. At any rate, my presence would be more welcome anywhere than in this house, whose roof shelters you, Countess. If, Herr Casper, you intend to share with my wife and the twins what is left after the old wealth has gone, unfortunately, I cannot permit you to do so. I will provide for them also. True, it was your duty; for ever since Isabella became my wife you have taken advantage of my poverty and impaired my right to command her. That must be changed from this very day. I have learned the bitter taste of the bread which you provide. I shall confide them to my uncle, the Knight Heideck. He was my dead mother's only brother, and his wife, as you know, is the children's godmother. They are childless, and would consider it the most precious of gifts to have such boys in the castle. My deserted wife must stay with him, while I—I know not yet in what master's service—provide that the three are not supported only by the charity of strangers——"

"Oh, Seitz, Seitz!" interrupted Isabella, in a tone of urgent entreaty. She had risen from her cushions, and was hurrying towards him. "Do not go! You must not go so!"

Her tall figure nestled closely against him as she spoke, and she threw her arms around his neck; but he kissed her brow and eyes, saying, with a gentleness which surprised even her: "You are very kind, but I cannot, must not remain here."

"The children, the little boys!" she exclaimed again, gazing up at him with love-beaming eyes.

Then his tortured heart seemed to shrink, and, pressing his hand on his brow, he paused some time ere he answered gloomily: "It is for them that I go. Words have been spoken which appeal to me, and to you, too, Isabella: 'See that the innocent little creatures are reared to be unlike their unhappy father.' And the person who uttered them——"

"A sage, a great sage," giggled the countess, unable to control her bitter wrath against the man whom she hated; but Siebenburg fiercely retorted:

"Although no sage, at least no monster spitting venom."

"And you permit this insult to be offered to your grandmother?" Frau Rosalinde Eysvogel wailed to her daughter as piteously as if the injury had been inflicted on herself. But Isabella only clung more closely to her husband, heeding neither her mother's appeal nor her father's warning not to be deluded by Siebenburg's empty promises.

While the old countess vainly struggled for words, Rosalinde Eysvogel stood beside the lofty mantelpiece, weeping softly. Before Siebenburg appeared, spite of the early hour and the agitating news which she had just received, she had used her leisure for an elaborate toilette. A long trailing robe of costly brocade, blue on the left side and yellow on the right, now floated around her tall

figure. When the knight returned she had looked radiant in her gold and gems, like a princess. Now, crushed and feeble, she presented a pitiable image of powerless yet offensively hollow splendour. It would have required too much exertion to assail her son-in-law with invectives, like her energetic mother; but when she saw her daughter, to whom she had already appealed several times in a tone of anguished entreaty, rest her proud head so tenderly on her husband's broad breast, as she had done during the first weeks of their marriage, but never since, the unhappy woman clearly perceived that the knight's incredible demand was meant seriously. What she had believed an idle boast he actually requested. Yonder hated intruder expected her to part with her only daughter, who was far more to her than her unloved husband, her exacting mother, or the son who restricted her wishes, whom she had never understood, and against whom her heart had long been hardened. But it could not be and, losing all self-control and dignity, she shrieked aloud, tore the blue headband from her hair and, repeating the "never" constantly as if she had gone out of her senses, gasped: "Never, never, never, so long as I live!"

As she spoke she rushed to her startled husband, pointed to her son-in-law, who still held his wife in a close embrace, and in a half-stifled voice commanded Herr Casper to strike down the gambler, robber, spendthrift, and kidnapper of chil-

dren, or drive him out of the house like some savage, dangerous beast. Then she ordered Isabella to leave the profligate who wanted to drag her down to ruin; and when her daughter refused to obey, she burst into violent weeping, sobbing and moaning till her strength failed and she was really attacked with one of the convulsions she had often feigned, by the advice of her own mother, to extort from her husband the gratification of some extravagant wish.

Indignant, yet full of sincere sympathy, Herr Casper supported his wife, whose queenly beauty had once fired his heart, and in whose embrace he had imagined that he would be vouchsafed here below the joys of the redeemed. As she rested her head, with its long auburn tresses, still so luxuriant, upon his shoulder, exquisite pictures of the past rose before the mental vision of the elderly man; but the spell was quickly broken, for the kerchief with which he wiped her face was dyed red from her rouged cheeks.

A bitter smile hovered around his well-formed, beardless lips, and the man of business remembered the vast sums which he had squandered to gratify the extravagant wishes of the mother and daughter, and show these countesses that he, the burgher, in whose veins ran noble blood, understood as well as any man of their own rank how to increase the charm of life by luxury and splendour.

While he supported his wife, and the old countess was seeking to relieve her, Isabella also prepared to hasten to her mother's assistance, but her husband stopped her with resistless strength, whispering: "You know that these convulsions are not dangerous. Come with me to the children. I want to bid them farewell. Show me in this last hour, at least, that these women are not more to you than I." He released her as he spoke, and the mental struggle which for a short time made her bosom heave violently with her hurried breathing ended with a low exclamation, "I will come."

The nurse, whom Isabella sent out of the room when she entered with her husband, silently obeyed, but stopped at the door to watch. She saw the turbulent knight kneel beside the children's cradle before the wife whom he had so basely neglected, raise his tearful eyes to the majestic woman, whose stature was little less than his own and, lifting his clasped hands, make a confession which she could not hear; saw her draw him towards her, nestle with loving devotion against his broad breast, and place first one and then the other twin boy in his arms.

The young mother's cheeks as well as the father's were wet, but the eyes of both sparkled with grateful joy when Isabella, in taking leave of her husband, thanked him with a last loving kiss for the vow that, wherever he might go, he would treasure her and the children in his heart,

and do everything in his power to secure a fate that should be worthy of them.

As Siebenburg went downstairs he met his father-in-law on the second-story landing. Herr Casper, deadly pale, was clinging with his right hand to the baluster, pressing his left on his brow, as he vainly struggled for composure and breath. He had forgotten to strengthen himself with food and drink, and the terrible blows of fate which had fallen upon him during these last hours of trial crushed, though but for a short time, his still vigorous strength. The knight went nearer to help him, but when he offered Herr Casper his arm the old merchant angrily thrust it back and accepted a servant's support.

While the man assisted him upstairs he repented that he had yielded to resentment, and not asked his son-in-law to try to discover Wolff's hiding place, but no sooner had food and fiery wine strengthened him than his act seemed wise. The return of the business partner, without whose knowledge he had incurred great financial obligations, would have placed him in the most painful situation. The old gentleman would have been obliged to account to Wolff for the large sum which he owed to the Jew Pfefferkorn, the most impatient of his creditors, though he need not have told him that he had used it in Venice to gratify his love of gaming. How should he answer his son if he asked why he had rejected his betrothed

bride, and soon after condescended to receive her again as his daughter and enter into close relations with her father? Yet this must be done. Ernst Ortlieb was the only person who could help him. It had become impossible to seek aid from Herr Berthold Vorchtel, the man whose oldest son Wolff had slain, and yet he possessed the means to save the sinking ship from destruction.

When the news of the duel reached him the messenger's blanched face had made him believe that Wolff had fallen. In that moment he had perceived that his loss would have rendered him miserable for the rest of his life. This was a source of pleasure, for since Wolff had extorted his consent to the betrothal with Els Ortlieb, and thus estranged him from the Vorchtels, he had seriously feared that he had ceased to love him. Nay, in many an hour when he had cause to feel shame in the presence of his prudent, cautious, and upright partner, it had seemed as if he hated him. Now the fear of the judge whom he saw in Wolff was blended with sincere anxiety concerning his only son, whose breach of the peace menaced him with banishment—nay, if he could not pay the price of blood which the Vorchtels might demand, with death. Doubtless he had done many things to prejudice Wolff against his betrothed bride, yet he who had cast the first stone at her now felt that, in her simple purity, she would be capable of no repudiation of the fidelity she owed her future

husband. However strongly he had struggled against this conviction, he knew that she, if any one, could make his son happy—far happier than he had ever been with the tall, slender, snow-white, unapproachable countess, who had helped bring him to ruin.

While consuming the food and drink, he heard his wife, usually a most obedient daughter, disputing with her mother. This was fortunate; for, if they were at variance, he need not fear that they would act as firm allies against him when he expressed the wish to have Wolff's marriage solemnised as soon as circumstances would permit.

It was not yet time to discuss the matter with any one. He would first go to the Jew Pfefferkorn once more to persuade him to defer his claims, and then, before the meeting of the Council, would repair to the Ortliebs, to commit to Herr Ernst the destiny of the Eysvogel firm and his partner Wolff, on which also depended the welfare of the young merchant's betrothed bride. If the father remained obdurate, if he resented the wrong he had inflicted yesterday upon him and his daughter, he was a lost man; for he had already availed himself of the good will of all those whose doors usually stood open to him. Doubtless the news of his recent severe losses were in every one's mouth, and the letter which he had just received threatened him with an indictment.

The luckless Siebenburg's creditors, too, would

now be added to his own. It was all very well for him to say that he would settle his debts himself. As soon as it was rumoured abroad that he had gambled away the estate of Tannenreuth, whose value gave the creditors some security, they would rise as one man, and the house assailed would be his, Casper Eysvogel's.

The harried man's thoughts of his son-in-law were by no means the most kindly.

Meanwhile the latter set out for the second distasteful interview of the morning.

His purpose was to make some arrangement with Heinz Schorlin about the lost estate and obtain definite knowledge concerning his quarrel with him, of which he remembered nothing except that intoxication and jealousy had carried him further than would have happened otherwise. He had undoubtedly spoken insultingly of Els; his words, when uttered against a lady, had been sharper than beseemed a knight. Yet was not any one who found a maiden alone at night with this man justified in doubting her virtue? In the depths of his soul he believed in her innocence, yet he avoided confessing it. Why should not the Swiss, whom Nature had given such power over the hearts of women, have also entangled his brother-in-law's betrothed bride in a love affair? Why should not the gay girl who had pledged her troth to a grave, dull fellow like Wolff, have been tempted into a little love dalliance with the bold, joyous Schorlin?

Not until he had received proof that he had erred would he submit to recall his charges.

He had left his wife with fresh courage and full of good intentions. Now that he was forced to bid her farewell, he first realised what she had been to him. No doubt both had much to forgive, but she was a splendid woman. Though her father's storehouses contained chests of spices and bales of cloth, he did not know one more queenly. That he could have preferred, even for a single moment, the Countess von Montfort, whose sole advantage over her was her nimble tongue and gay, bold manners, now seemed incomprehensible. He had joined Cordula's admirers only to forget at her feet the annoyances with which he had been wearied at home. He had but one thing for which to thank the countess—her remark concerning the future of the twins.

Yet was he really so base that it would have been a disgrace for his darlings to resemble him? "No!" a voice within cried loudly, and as the same voice reminded him of the victories won in tournaments and sword combats, of the open hand with which, since he had been the rich Eysvogel's son-in-law, he had lent and given money to his brothers, and especially of the manly resolve to provide for his wife and children as a soldier in the service of some prince, another, lower, yet insistent, recalled other things. It referred to the time when, with his brothers, he had attacked a train of freight waggons and not cut down their

armed escort alone. The curse of a broad-shouldered Nordlinger carrier, whose breast he had pierced with a lance though he cried out that he was a father and had a wife and child to support, the shriek of the pretty boy with curling brown hair who clung to the bridle of his steed as he rode against the father, and whose arm he had cut off, still seemed to ring in his ears. He also remembered the time when, after a rich capture on the highway which had filled his purse, he had ridden to Nuremberg in magnificent new clothes at the carnival season in order, by his brothers' counsel, to win a wealthy bride. Fortune and the saints had permitted him to find a woman to satisfy both his avarice and his heart, yet he had neither kept faith with her nor even showed her proper consideration. But, strangely enough, the warning voice reproached him still more sharply for having, in the presence of others, accused and disparaged his brother-in-law's betrothed bride, whose guilt he believed proved. Again he felt how ignoble and unworthy of a knight his conduct had been. Why had he pursued this course? Merely—he admitted it now—to harm Wolff, the monitor and niggard whom he hated; perhaps also because he secretly told himself that, if Wolff formed a happy marriage, he and his children, not Siebenburg's twin boys, would obtain the larger share of the Eysvogel property.

This greed of gain, which had brought him to

Nuremberg to seek a wife, was probably latent in his blood, though his reckless accumulation of debts seemed to contradict it. Yesterday, at the Duke of Pomerania's, it had again led him into that wild, mad dice-throwing.

Seitz Siebenburg was no calm thinker. All these thoughts passed singly in swift flashes through his excited brain. Like the steady monotone of the bass accompanying the rise and fall of the air, he constantly heard the assurance that it would be a pity if his splendid twins should resemble him.

Therefore they must grow up away from his influence, under the care of his good uncle. With this man's example before their eyes they would become knights as upright and noble as Kunz Heideck, whom every one esteemed.

For the sake of the twins he had resolved to begin a new and worthier life himself. His wife would aid him, and love should lend him strength to conduct himself in future so that Countess von Montfort, and every one who meant well by his sons, might wish them to resemble their father.

He walked on, holding his head proudly erect. Seeing the first worshippers entering the Church of Our Lady, he went in, too, repeated several Paternosters, commended the little boys and their mother to the care of the gracious Virgin, and besought her to help him curb the turbulent impulses

which often led him to commit deeds he afterwards regretted.

Many people knew Casper Eysvogel's tall, haughty son-in-law and marvelled at the fervent devotion with which, kneeling in the first place he found near the entrance, beside two old women, he continued to pray. Was it true that the Eysvogel firm had been placed in a very critical situation by the loss of great trains of merchandise? One of his neighbours had heard him sigh, and declared that something must weigh heavily upon the "Mustache." She would tell her nephew Hemerlein, the belt-maker, to whom the knight owed large sums for saddles and harnesses, that he would be wise to look after his money betimes.

Siebenburg quitted the church in a more hopeful mood than when he entered it.

The prayers had helped him.

When he reached the fruit market he noticed that people gazed at him in surprise. He had paid no heed to his dress since the morning of the previous day, and as he always consumed large quantities of food and drink he felt the need of refreshment. Entering the first barber's shop, he had the stubble removed from his cheeks and chin, and arranged his disordered attire, and then, going to a taproom close by, ate and drank, without sitting down, what he found ready and, invigorated in body and mind, continued his walk.

The fruit market was full of busy life. Juicy

strawberries and early cherries, red radishes, heads of cabbages, bunches of greens, and long stalks of asparagus were offered for sale, with roses and auriculas, balsams and early pinks, in pots and bouquets, and the ruddy peasant lasses behind the stands, the stately burgher women in their big round hats, the daughters of the master workmen with their long floating locks escaping from under richly embroidered caps, the maidservants with neat little baskets on their round arms, afforded a varied and pleasing scene. Everything that reached the ear, too, was cheery and amusing, and rendered the knight's mood brighter.

Proud of his newly acquired power of resistance, he walked on, after yielding to the impulse to buy the handsomest bouquet of roses offered by the pretty flower girl Kuni, whom, on Countess Cordula's account, during the Reichstag he had patronised more frequently than usual. Without knowing why himself, he did not tell the pretty girl, who had already trusted him very often, for whom he intended it, but ordered it to be charged with the rest.

At the corner of the Bindergasse, where Heinz Schorlin lodged, he found a beggar woman with a bandaged head, whom he commissioned to carry the roses to the Eysvogel mansion and give them to his wife, Frau Isabella Siebenburg, in his—Sir Seitz's—name.

In front of the house occupied by the master cloth-maker Deichsler, where the Swiss had his

quarters, the tailor Ploss stopped him. He came from Heinz Schorlin, and reminded Siebenburg of his by no means inconsiderable debt; but the latter begged him to have patience a little longer, as he had met with heavy losses at the gaming table the night before, and Ploss agreed to wait till St. Heinrich's day.*

How many besides the tailor had large demands! and when could Seitz begin to cancel his debts? The thought even darted through his mind that instead of carrying his good intentions into effect he had not paid for the roses—but flowers were so cheap in June!

Besides, he had no time to dwell upon this trifle, for while quieting the tailor he had noticed a girl who, notwithstanding the heat of the day, kept her face hidden so far under her *Riese* † that nothing but her eyes and the upper part of her nose were visible. She had given him a hasty nod and, if he was not mistaken, it was the Ortlieb sisters' maid, whom he had often seen.

When he again looked after the muffled figure she was hurrying up the cloth-maker's stairs.

It was Kätterle herself.

At the first landing she had glanced back, and in doing so pushed the kerchief aside. What could she want with the Swiss? It could scarcely be

* The 15th of July.

† A kerchief for the head, resembling a veil, made of fine linen.

anything except to bring him a message from one of her mistresses, doubtless Els.

So he had seen aright, and acted wisely not to believe the countess.

Poor Wolff! Deceived even when a betrothed lover! He did not exactly wish him happiness even now, and yet he pitied him.

Seitz could now stand before Heinz Schorlin with the utmost confidence. The Swiss must know how matters stood between the older E and himself, though his knightly duty constrained him to deny it to others. Siebenburg's self-reproaches had been vain. He had suspected no innocent girl—only called a faithless betrothed bride by the fitting name.

The matter concerning his estate of Tannenreuth was worse. It had been gambled away, and therefore forfeited. He had already given it up in imagination; it was only necessary to have the transfer made by the notary. The Swiss should learn how a true knight satisfies even the heaviest losses at the gaming table. He would not spare Heinz Schorlin. He meant to reproach the unprincipled fellow who by base arts had alienated the betrothed bride of an honest man—for that Wolff certainly was—when adverse circumstances prevented his watching the faithless woman himself. Twisting the ends of his mustache with two rapid motions, he knocked at the young knight's door.

CHAPTER XVII.

TWICE, three times, Siebenburg rapped, but in vain. Yet the Swiss was there. His armour-bearer had told Seitz so downstairs, and he heard his voice within. At last he struck the door so heavily with the handle of his dagger that the whole house echoed with the sound. This succeeded; the door opened, and Biberli's narrow head appeared. He looked at the visitor in astonishment.

"Tell your master," said the latter imperiously, recognising Heinz Schorlin's servant, "that if he closes his lodgings against dunning tradesfolk——"

"By your knock, my lord," Biberli interrupted, "we really thought the sword cutler had come with hammer and anvil. My master, however, need have no fear of creditors; for though you may not yet know it, Sir Knight, there are generous noblemen in Nuremberg during the Reichstag who throw away castles and lands in his favour at the gaming table."

"And hurl their fists even more swiftly into the faces of insolent varlets!" cried Siebenburg, rais-

ing his right hand threateningly. "Now take me to your master at once!"

"Or, at any rate, within his four walls," replied the servitor, preceding Seitz into the small anteroom from which he had come. "As to the 'at once,' that rests with the saints, for you must know——"

"Nonsense!" interrupted the knight. "Tell your master that Siebenburg has neither time nor inclination to wait in his antechamber."

"And certainly nothing could afford Sir Heinz Schorlin greater pleasure than your speedy departure," Biberli retorted.

"Insolent knave!" thundered Seitz, who perceived the insult conveyed in the reply, grasping the neck of his long robe; but Biberli felt that he had seized only the hood, swiftly unclasped it, and as he hurried to a side door, through which loud voices echoed, Siebenburg heard the low cry of a woman. It came from behind a curtain spread over some clothes that hung on the wall, and Seitz said to himself that the person must be the maid whom he had just met. She was in Els Ortlieb's service, and he was glad to have this living witness at hand.

If he could induce Heinz to talk with him here in the anteroom it would be impossible for her to escape. So, feigning that he had noticed nothing, he pretended to be much amused by Biberli's nimble flight. Forcing a laugh, he flung the hood at

his head, and before he opened the door of the adjoining room again asked to speak to his master.

Biberli replied that he must wait; the knight was holding a religious conversation with a devout old mendicant friar. If he might venture to offer counsel, he would not interrupt his master now; he had received very sad news, and the tailor who came to take his measure for his mourning garments had just left him. If Seitz had any business with the knight, and expected any benefit from his favour and rare generosity——

But Siebenburg let him get no farther. Forgetting the stratagem which was to lure Heinz hither, he burst into a furious rage, fiercely declaring that he sought favour and generosity from no man, least of all a Heinz Schorlin and, advancing to the door, flung the servant who barred his passage so rudely against the wall that he uttered a loud cry of pain.

Ere it had died away Heinz appeared on the threshold. A long white robe increased the pallor of his face, but yesterday so ruddy, and his reddened eyes showed traces of recent tears.

When he perceived what had occurred, and saw his faithful follower, with a face distorted by pain, rubbing his shoulder, his cheeks flushed angrily, and with just indignation he rebuked Siebenburg for his unseemly intrusion into his quarters and his brutal conduct.

Then, without heeding the knight, he asked

Biberli if he was seriously injured, and when the latter answered in the negative he again turned to Seitz and briefly enquired what he wanted. If he desired to own that, while in a state of senseless intoxication he had slandered modest maidens, and was ignorant of his actions when he staked his castle and lands against the gold lying before him, Heinz Schorlin, he might keep Tannenreuth. The form in which he would revoke his calumny to Jungfrau Ortlieb he would discuss with him later. At present his mind was occupied with more important matters than the senseless talk of a drunkard, and he would therefore request the knight to leave him.

As Heinz uttered the last words he pointed to the door, and this indiscreet, anything but inviting gesture robbed Siebenburg of the last remnant of composure maintained with so much difficulty.

Nothing is more infuriating to weak natures than to have others expect them to pursue a course opposite to that which, after a victory over baser impulses, they have recognised as the right one and intended to follow. He who had come to resign his lost property voluntarily was regarded by the Swiss as an importunate mendicant; he who stood here to prove that he was perfectly justified in accusing Els Ortlieb of a crime, Schorlin expected to make a revocation against his better knowledge. And what price did the insolent fellow demand for the restored estate and the right to

brand him as a slanderer? The pleasure of seeing the unwelcome guest retire as quickly as possible. No greater degree of contempt and offensive presumption could be imagined, and as Seitz set his own admirable conduct during the past few hours far above the profligate behaviour of the Swiss, he was fired with honest indignation and, far from heeding the white robe and altered countenance of his enemy, gave the reins to his wrath.

Pale with fury, he flung, as it were, the estate the Swiss had won from him at his feet, amid no lack of insulting words.

At first Heinz listened to the luckless gambler's outbreak of rage in silent amazement, but when the latter began to threaten, and even clapped his hand on his sword, the composure which never failed him in the presence of anything that resembled danger quickly returned.

He had felt a strong aversion to Siebenburg from their first meeting, and the slanderous words with which he had dragged in the dust the good name of a maiden who, Heinz knew, had incurred suspicion solely through his fault, had filled him with scorn. So, with quiet contempt, he let him rave on; but when the person to whom he had just been talking—the old Minorite monk whom he had met on the highroad and accompanied to Nuremberg—appeared at the door of the next room, he stopped Seitz with a firm "Enough!" pointed to the old man, and in brief, simple words, gave the

castle and lands of Tannenreuth to the monastery of the mendicant friars of the Franciscan order in Nuremberg.

Siebenburg listened with a contemptuous shrug of the shoulders, then he said bitterly: "I thought that a life of poverty was the chief rule in the order of St. Francis. But no matter! May the gift won at the gaming table profit the holy Brothers. For you, Sir Knight, it will gain the favour of the Saint of Assisi, whose power is renowned. So you have acted wisely."

Here he hesitated; he felt choked with rage. But while the Minorite was thanking Heinz for the generous gift, Siebenburg's eyes again rested on the curtain behind which the maid was concealed.

It was now his turn to deal the Swiss a blow. The old mendicant friar was a venerable person whose bearing commanded respect, and Heinz seemed to value his good opinion. For that very reason the Minorite should learn the character of this patron of his order.

"Since you so earnestly desire to be rid of my company, Sir Heinz Schorlin," he continued, "I will fulfil your wish. Only just now you appeared to consider certain words uttered last night in reference to a lady——"

"Let that pass," interrupted Heinz with marked emphasis.

"I might expect that desire," replied Siebenburg scornfully; "for as you are in the act of gain-

ing the favour of Heaven by pious works, it will be agreeable to you——"

"What?" asked the Swiss sharply.

"You will surely desire," was the reply, "to change conduct which is an offence to honourable people, and still more to the saints above. You who have estranged a betrothed bride from her lover and lured her to midnight interviews, no doubt suppose yourself safe from the future husband, whom the result of a duel—as you know—will keep from her side. But Wolff happens to be my brother-in-law, and if I feel disposed to take his place and break a lance with you——"

Heinz, pale as death, interrupted him, exclaiming in a tone of the deepest indignation: "So be it, then. We will have a tilt with lances, and then we will fight with our swords."

Siebenburg looked at him an instant, as if puzzled by his adversary's sharp assault, but quickly regained his composure and answered: "Agreed! In the joust* with sharp weapons it will soon appear who has right on his side."

"Right?" asked Heinz in astonishment, shrugging his shoulders scornfully.

"Yes, right," cried the other furiously, "which you have ceased to prize."

"So far from it," the Swiss answered quietly, "that before we discuss the mode of combat with

* Single combat in the tourney.

the herald I must ask you to recall the insults with which yesterday, in your drunkenness, you injured the honour of a virtuous maiden in the presence of other knights and gentlemen."

"Whose protector," laughed Seitz, "you seem to have constituted yourself, by your own choice, in her bridegroom's place."

"I accept the position," replied Heinz with cool deliberation. "Not you, nay, I will fight in Wolff Eysvogel's stead—and with his consent, I think. I know him, and esteem him so highly——"

"That you invite his plighted bride to nocturnal love dalliance, and exchange love messages with her," interrupted the other.

This was too much for Heinz Schorlin and, with honest indignation, he cried: "Prove it! Or, by our Lord's blood!—My sword, Biberli!—Spite of the peace proclaimed throughout the land, you shall learn, ere you open your slandering lips again——"

Here he paused suddenly, for while Biberli withdrew to obey the command which, though it probably suited his wishes, he was slow in executing, doubtless that he might save his master from a reckless act, Siebenburg, frantic with fury, rushed to the curtain. Ere Heinz could interfere, he jerked it back so violently that he tore it from the fastenings and forced the terrified maid, whose arm he grasped, to approach the knight with him.

Heinz had seen Kätterle only by moonlight

and in the twilight, so her unexpected appearance gave him no information. He gazed at her enquiringly, with as much amazement as though she had risen from the earth. Siebenburg gave him no time to collect his thoughts, but dragged the girl before the monk and, raising his voice in menace, commanded: "Tell the holy Brother who you are, woman!"

"Kätterle of Sarnen," she answered, weeping.

"And whom do you serve?" the knight demanded.

"The Ortlieb sisters, Jungfrau Els and Jungfrau Eva," was the reply.

"The beautiful Es, as they are called here, holy Brother," said Siebenburg with a malicious laugh, "whose maid I recognise in this girl. If she did not come hither to mend the linen of her mistress's friend——"

But here Biberli, who on his return to the anteroom had been terrified by the sight of his sweetheart, interrupted the knight by turning to Heinz with the exclamation: "Forgive me, my lord. Surely you know that she is my betrothed bride. She came just now—scarcely a dozen Paternosters ago—to talk with me about the marriage."

Kätterle had listened in surprise to the bold words of her true and steadfast lover, yet she was not ill pleased, for he had never before spoken of their marriage voluntarily. At the same time she felt the obligation of aiding him and nodded

assent, while Siebenburg rudely interrupted the servant by calling to the monk: "Lies and deception, pious Brother. Black must be whitened here. She stole, muffled, to her mistress's gallant, to bring a message from the older beautiful E, with whom this godly knight was surprised last night."

Again the passionate outbreak of his foe restored the Swiss to composure. With a calmness which seemed to the servant incomprehensible, though it filled him with delight, he turned to the monk, saying earnestly and simply: "Appearances may be against me, Pater Benedictus. I will tell you all the circumstances at once. How this maid came here will be explained later. As for the maiden whom this man calls the older beautiful E, never—I swear it by our saint—have I sought her love or received from her the smallest token of her favour."

Then turning to Siebenburg he continued, still calmly, but with menacing sternness: "If I judge you aright, you will now go from one to another telling whom you found here, in order to injure the fair fame of the maiden whom your wife's valiant brother chose for his bride, and to place my name with hers in the pillory."

"Where Els Ortlieb belongs rather than in the honourable home of a Nuremberg patrician," retorted Siebenburg furiously. "If she became too base for my brother-in-law, the fault is yours. I shall certainly take care that he learns the truth

and knows where, and at what an hour, his betrothed bride met foreign heartbreakers. To open the eyes of others concerning her will also be a pleasant duty."

Heinz sprang towards Biberli to snatch the sword from his hand, but he held it firmly, seeking his master's eyes with a look of warning entreaty; but his faithful solicitude would have been futile had not the monk lent his aid. The old man's whispered exhortation to his young friend to spare the imperial master, to whom he was so deeply indebted, a fresh sorrow, restored to the infuriated young knight his power of self-control. Pushing the thick locks back from his brow with a hasty movement, he answered in a tone of the most intense contempt:

"Do what you will, but remember this: Beware that, ere the joust begins, you do not ride the rail instead of the charger. The maidens whose pure name you so yearn to sully are of noble birth, and if they appear to complain of you——"

"Then I will proclaim the truth," Siebenburg retorted, "and the Court of Love and Pursuivant at Arms will deprive you, the base seducer, of the right to enter the lists rather than me, my handsome knight!"

"So be it," replied Heinz quietly. "You can discuss the other points with my herald. Wolff Eysvogel, too—rely upon it—will challenge you, if you fulfil your base design."

Then, turning his back upon Seitz without a word of farewell, he motioned the monk towards the open door of the antechamber, and letting him lead the way, closed it behind them.

"He will come to you, you boaster!" Siebenburg shouted contemptuously after the Swiss, and then turned to Biberli and the maid with a patronising question; but the former, without even opening his lips in reply, hastened to the door and, with a significant gesture, induced the knight to retire.

Seitz submitted and hastened down the stairs, his eyes flashing as if he had won a great victory. At the door of the house he grasped the hilt of his sword, and then, with rapid movements, twisted the ends of his mustache. The surprise he had given the insolent Swiss by the discovery of his love messenger—it had acted like a spell—could not have succeeded better. And what had Schorlin alleged in justification? Nothing, absolutely nothing at all. Wolff Eysvogel's herald should challenge the Swiss, not him, who meant to open the deceived lover's eyes concerning his betrothed bride.

He eagerly anticipated the joust and the sword combat with Heinz. The sharper the herald's conditions the better. He had hurled more powerful foes than the Swiss from the saddle, and from knightly "courtoisie" not even used his strength without consideration. Heinz Schorlin should feel it.

He gazed around him like a victor, and throwing his head back haughtily he went down the Bindergasse, this time past the Franciscan monastery towards the Town Hall and the fish market. Eber, the sword cutler, lived there and, spite of the large sum he owed him, Seitz wished to talk with him about the sharp weapons he needed for the joust. On his way he gave his imagination free course. It showed him his impetuous onset, his enemy's fall in the sand, the sword combat, and the end of the joust, the swift death of his hated foe.

These pictures of the future occupied his thoughts so deeply that he neither saw nor heard what was passing around him. Many a person for whom he forgot to turn aside looked angrily after him. Suddenly he found his farther progress arrested. The crier had just raised his voice to announce some important tidings to the people who thronged around him between the Town Hall and the Franciscan monastery. Perhaps he might have succeeded in forcing a passage through the concourse, but when he heard the name "Ernst Ortlieb," in the monotonous speech of the city crier, he followed the remainder of his notice. It made known to the citizens of Nuremberg that, since the thunderstorm of the preceding night, a maid had been missing from the house of the Honourable Herr Ernst Ortlieb, of the Council, a Swiss by birth, Katharina of Sarnen, called Kätterle, a

woman of blameless reputation. Whoever should learn anything concerning the girl was requested to bring the news to the Ortlieb residence.

What did this mean?

If the girl had vanished at midnight and not returned to her employers since, she could scarcely have sought Heinz Schorlin as a messenger of love from Els. But if she had not come to the Swiss from one of the Es, what proof did he, Seitz, possess of the guilt of his brother-in-law's bride? How should he succeed in making Wolff understand that his beloved Els had wronged him if the maid was to play no part in proving it? Yesterday evening he had not believed firmly in her guilt; that very morning it had even seemed to him a shameful thing that he had cast suspicion upon her in the presence of others. The encounter with the maid at the Swiss knight's lodgings had first induced him to insist on his accusation so defiantly. And now? If Heinz Schorlin, with the help of the Ortliebs, succeeded in proving the innocence of those whom he had accused, then—ah, he must not pursue that train of thought—then, at the lady's accusation, he might be deprived of the right to enter the lists in the tournament; then all the disgrace which could be inflicted upon the slanderous defamer of character threatened him; then Wolff would summon him to a reckoning, as well as Heinz Schorlin. Wolff, whom he had begun to hate since, with his resistless arm of iron, he had exposed him for the

first time to the malicious glee of the bystanders in the fencing hall.

Yet it was not this which suddenly bowed his head and loudly admonished him that he had again behaved like a reckless fool. Cowardice was his least fault. He did not fear what might befall him in battle. Whether he would be barred out from the lists was the terrible question which darkened the bright morning already verging towards noon. He had charged Els with perfidy in the presence of others, and thereby exposed her, the plighted bride of a knight, to the utmost scorn. And besides—fool that he was!—his brothers had again attacked a train of waggons on the highway and would soon be called to account as robbers. This would certainly lead the Swiss and others to investigate his own past, and the Pursuivant at Arms excluded from joust and tourney whoever "injured trade or merchant." What would not his enemy, who was in such high favour with the Emperor, do to compass his destruction? But—and at the thought he uttered a low imprecation—how could he ride to the joust if his father-in-law closed his strong box which, moreover, was said to be empty? If the old man was forced to declare himself bankrupt Siebenburg's creditors would instantly seize his splendid chargers and costly suits of armour, scarcely one half of which were paid for. How much money he needed as security in case of defeat! His sole property was debts. Yet—the

thought seemed like an illumination—his wife's valuable old jewels could probably still be saved, and she might be induced to give him part of the ornaments for the tournament. He need only make her understand that his honour and that of the twins were at stake. Would that Heaven might spare his boys such hours of anxiety and self-accusation!

But what was this? Was he deluding himself? Did his over-excited imagination make him hear a death knell pealing for his honour and his hopes, which must be borne to their grave? Yet no! All the citizens and peasants, men and women, great and small, who thronged the salt market, which he had just entered, raised their heads to listen with him; for from every steeple at once rang the mournful death knell which announced to the city the decease of an "honourable" member of the Council, a secular or ecclesiastical prince. The mourning banner was already waving on the roof of the Town Hall, towards which he turned. Men in the service of the city were hoisting other black flags upon the almshouse, and now the Hegelein,* in mourning garments, mounted on a steed caparisoned with *crêpe*, came riding by at the head of other horsemen clad in sable, proclaiming to the throng that Hartmann, the Emperor Rudolph's promising son, had found an untimely end. The

* Proclaimer of decrees.

noble youth was drowned while bathing in the Rhine.

It seemed as if a frost had blighted a blooming garden. The gay bustle in the market place was paralysed. The loud sobs of many women blended with exclamations of grief and pity from bearded lips which had just been merrily bargaining for salt and fish, meat and game. Messengers with *crêpe* on their hats or caps forced a passage through the throng, and a train of German knights, priests, and monks passed with bowed heads, bearing candles in their hands, between the Town Hall and St. Sebald's Church towards the corn magazine and the citadel.

Meanwhile dark clouds were spreading slowly over the bright-blue vault of the June sky. A flock of rooks hovered around the Town Hall, and then flew, with loud cries, towards the castle.

Seitz watched them indifferently. Even the great omnipotent sovereign there had his own cross to bear; tears flowed in his proud palace also, and sighs of anguish were heard. And this was just. He had never wished evil to any one who did not injure him, but even if he could have averted this sore sorrow from the Emperor Rudolph he would not have stirred a finger. His coronation had been a blow to him and to his brothers. Formerly they had been permitted to work their will on the highways, but the Hapsburg, the Swiss, had pitilessly stopped their brigandage. Now for the

first time robber-knights were sentenced and their castles destroyed. The Emperor meant to transform Germany into a sheepfold, Absbach exclaimed. The Siebenburg brothers were his faithful allies, and though they complained that the joyous, knightly clank of arms would be silenced under such a sovereign, they themselves took care that the loud battle shouts, cries of pain, and shrieks for aid were not hushed on the roads used for traffic by the merchants. But this was not Seitz's sole reason for shrugging his shoulders at the expressions of the warmest sympathy which rose around him. The Emperor was tenderly attached to Heinz Schorlin, and the man who was so kindly disposed to his foe could never be his friend. Perhaps to-morrow Rudolph might behead his brothers and elevate Heinz Schorlin to still greater honours. Seitz, whose eyes had overflowed with tears when the warder of his native castle lost his aged wife, who had been his nurse, now found no cause to grieve with the mourners.

So he continued his way, burdened with his own anxieties, amid the tears and lamentations of the multitude. The numerous retinue of servants in the Eysvogel mansion were moving restlessly to and fro; the news of the prince's death had reached them. Herr Casper had left the house. He was probably at Herr Ernst Ortlieb's. If the latter had already learned what he, Seitz Siebenburg, had said at the gaming table of his daughter, perhaps

his hand had dealt the first decisive blow at the tottering house where, so long as it stood, his wife and the twins would under any circumstances find shelter. Resentment against the Swiss, hatred, and jealousy, had made him a knave, and at the same time the most shortsighted of fools.

As he approached the second story, in which the nursery was situated and where he expected to find his wife, it suddenly seemed as if a star had risen amid the darkness. If he poured out his heart to Isabella and let her share the terrible torture of his soul, perhaps it would awaken a tender sympathy in the woman who still loved him, and who was dearer to him than he could express. Her jewels were certainly very valuable, but far more precious was the hope of being permitted to rest his aching head upon her breast and feel her slender white hand push back the hair from his anxious brow. Oh, if misfortune would draw her again as near to him as during the early months of their married life and directly before it, he could rise from his depression with fresh vigour and transform the battle, now half lost, into victory. Besides, she was clever and had power over the hearts of her family, so perhaps she might point out the pathway of escape, which his brain, unused to reflection, could not discover.

His heart throbbed high as, animated by fresh hope, he entered the corridor from which opened the rooms which he occupied with her. But his

wish to find her alone was not to be fulfilled; several voices reached him.

What was the meaning of the scene?

Isabella, her face deadly pale, and her tall figure drawn up to its full height, stood before the door of the nursery with a stern, cold expression on her lovely lips, like a princess pronouncing sentence upon a criminal. She was panting for breath, and before her, her mother, and her grandmother, Countess Cordula's pretty page, whom Siebenburg knew only too well, was moving to and fro with eager gestures. He held in his hand the bunch of roses which Seitz had sent to his newly-won wife and darling as a token of reconciliation, and Siebenburg heard his clear, boyish tones urge: "I have already said so and, noble lady, you may believe me, this bouquet, which the woman brought us, was intended for my gracious mistress, Countess von Montfort. It was meant to give her a fair morning greeting, and—— Do not let this vex you, for it was done only in the joyous game of love, as custom dictated. Ever since we came here your lord has daily honoured my countess with the loveliest flowers whose buds unfold in the region near the Rhine. But my gracious mistress, as you have already heard, believes that you, noble lady, have a better right to these unusually beautiful children of the spring than she who last evening bade your lord behold in you, not in her, fair lady, the most fitting object of his homage. So she sent

me hither, most gracious madam, to lay what is yours at your feet."

As he spoke, the agile boy, with a graceful bow, tried to place the flowers in Isabella's hand, but she would not receive the bouquet, and the abrupt gesture with which she pushed them back flung the nosegay on the floor. Paying no further heed to it, she answered in a cold, haughty tone: "Thank your mistress, and tell her that I appreciated her kind intention, but the roses which she sent me were too full of thorns." Then, turning her back on the page, she advanced with majestic pride to the door of the nursery.

Her mother and grandmother tried to follow, but Siebenburg pressed between them and his wife, and his voice thrilled with the anguish of a soul overwhelmed by despair as he cried imploringly: "Hear me, Isabella! There is a most unhappy misunderstanding here. By all that is sacred to me, by our love, by our children, I swear those roses were intended for you, my heart's treasure, and for you alone."

But Countess Rotterbach cut him short by exclaiming with a loud chuckle: "The unripe early pears will probably come from the fruit market to the housewife's hands later; the roses found their way to Countess von Montfort more quickly."

The malicious words were followed like an echo by Frau Rosalinde's tearful: "It is only too true. This also!"

The knight, unheeding the angry, upbraiding woman, hastened in pursuit of his wife to throw himself at her feet and confess the whole truth; but she, who had heard long before that Sir Seitz was paying Countess Cordula more conspicuous attention than beseemed a faithful husband, and who, after the happy hour so recently experienced, had expected, until the arrival of the page, the dawn of brighter, better days, now felt doubly abased, deceived, betrayed.

Without vouchsafing the unfortunate man even a glance or a word, she entered the nursery before he reached her; but he, feeling that he must follow her at any cost, laid his hand on the lock of the door and tried to open it. The strong oak resisted his shaking and pulling. Isabella had shot the heavy iron bolt into its place. Seitz first knocked with his fingers and then with his clenched fist, until the grandmother exclaimed: "You have destroyed the house, at least spare the doors."

Uttering a fierce imprecation, he went to his own chamber, hastily thrust into his pockets all the gold and valuables which he possessed, and then went out again into the street. His way led him past Kuni, the flower girl from whom he had bought the roses. The beggar who was to carry them to his wife did not hear distinctly, on account of her bandaged head, and not understanding the knight, went to the girl from whom she had seen him purchase the blossoms to ask where they be-

longed. Kuni pointed to the lodgings of the von Montforts, where she had already sent so many bouquets for Siebenburg. The latter saw both the flower-seller and the beggar woman, but did not attempt to learn how the roses which he intended for his wife had reached Countess Cordula. He suspected the truth, but felt no desire to have it confirmed. Fate meant to destroy him, he had learned that. The means employed mattered little. It would have been folly to strive against the superior power of such an adversary. Let ruin pursue its course. His sole wish was to forget his misery, though but for a brief time. He knew he could accomplish this by drink, so he entered the Mirror wine tavern and drained bumper after bumper with a speed which made the landlord, though he was accustomed to marvellous performances on the part of his guests, shake the head set on his immensely thick neck somewhat suspiciously.

The few persons present had gathered in a group and were talking sadly about the great misfortune which had assailed the Emperor. The universal grief displayed so hypocritically, as Seitz thought, angered him, and he gazed at them with such a sullen, threatening look that no one ventured to approach him. Sometimes he stared into his wine, sometimes into vacancy, sometimes at the vaulted ceiling above. He harshly rebuffed the landlord and the waiter who tried to accost him, but when the peasant's prediction was fulfilled and

the thunderstorm of the preceding night was followed at midnight by one equally severe, he arose and left the hostelry. The rain tempted him into the open air. The taproom was so sultry, so terribly sultry. The moisture of the heavens would refresh him.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE fury of the tempest had ceased, but the sky was still obscured by clouds. A cool breeze blew from the northeast through the damp, heavy air.

Heinz Schorlin was coming from the fortress, and after crossing the Diligengasse went directly towards his lodgings. His coat of mail, spurs, and helmeted head were accoutrements for the saddle, yet he was on foot. A throng of men, women, and children, whispering eagerly together, accompanied him. One pointed him out to another, as if there was something unusual about him. Two stalwart soldiers in the pay of the city followed, carrying his saddle and the equipments of his horse, and kept back the boys or women who boldly attempted to press too near.

Heinz did not heed the throng. He looked pale, and his thick locks, falling in disorder from under his helmet, floated around his face. The chain armour on his limbs and his long surcoat were covered with mire. The young knight, usually so trim, looked disordered and, as it were,

thrown off his balance. His bright face bore the impress of a horror still unconquered, as he gazed restlessly into vacancy, and seemed to be seeking something, now above and now in the ground.

The pretty young hostess, Frau Barbara Deichsler, holding her little three-year-old daughter by the hand, stood in front of the house in the Bindergasse where he lodged. The knight usually had a pleasant or merry word for her, and a gay jest or bit of candy for Annele. Nay, the young noble, who was fond of children, liked to toss the little one in his arms and play with her.

Frau Barbara had already heard that, as Heinz was returning from the fortress, the lightning had struck directly in front of him, killing his beautiful dun charger, which she had so often admired. It had happened directly before the eyes of the guard, and the news had gone from man to man of the incredible miracle which had saved the life of the young Swiss, the dearest friend of the Emperor's dead son.

When Heinz approached the door Frau Barbara stepped forward with Annele to congratulate him that the dear saints had so graciously protected him, but he only answered gravely: "What are we mortals? Rejoice in the child, Frau Barbara, so long as she is spared to you."

He passed into the entry as he spoke, but Frau Deichsler hastily prepared to call his armour-bearer, a grey-bearded Swiss who had served the

knight's father and slept away the hours not devoted to his duties or to the wine cup. He must supply the place of Biberli, who had left the house a long time before, and for the first time in many years was keeping his master waiting. But Heinz knew where he was, and while the armour-bearer was divesting him, awkwardly enough, of his suit of mail and gala attire, he was often seized with anxiety about his faithful follower, though many things with which the morning had burdened his soul lay nearer to his heart.

Never had he been so lucky in gambling as last night in the Duke of Pomerania's quarters. Biberli's advice to trust to the two and five had been repeatedly tested, and besides the estate of Tannenreuth, which Siebenburg had staked against all his winnings, he had brought home more gold than he had ever seen before.

Yet he had gone to rest in a mood by no means joyous. It was painful to him to deprive any one of his lands and home. He had even resisted accepting Siebenburg's reckless stake, but his obstinate persistence and demand could not be opposed. The calumnies by which the "Mustache" had assailed the innocent Els Ortlieb haunted him, and many others had shown their indignation against the traducer. Probably thirty gentlemen at the gaming table had been witnesses of these incidents, and if, to-morrow, it was in everybody's mouth that he, Heinz, had been caught at mid-

night in an interview with the elder beautiful Ortlieb E, the fault was his, and he would be burdened with the guilt of having sullied the honour and name of a pure maiden, the betrothed bride of an estimable man.

And Eva!

When he woke in the morning his first thought had been of her. She had seemed more desirable than ever. But his relatives at home, and the counsel Biberli had urged upon him during their nocturnal wandering, had constantly interposed between him and the maiden whom he so ardently loved. Besides, it seemed certain that the passion which filled his heart must end unhappily. Else what was the meaning of this unexampled good luck at the gaming table? The torture of this thought had kept him awake a long time. Then he had sunk into a deep, dreamless sleep. In the morning Biberli, full of delight, roused him, and displayed three large bags filled with florins and zecchins, the gains of the night before.

The servant had begged to be permitted to count the golden blessing, which in itself would suffice to buy the right to use the bridge from the city of Luzerne twice over, and the best thing about which was that it would restore the peace of mind of his lady mother at Schorlin Castle.

Now, in the name of all the saints, let him continue his life of liberty, and leave the somnam-

bulist to walk over the roofs, and suffer Altrosen, who had worn her colour so patiently, to wed the countess.

But how long the servitor's already narrow face became when Heinz, with a grave resolution new to Biberli, answered positively that no ducats would stray from these bags to Schorlin Castle. If, last night, anxiety had burdened his mind like the corpse of a murdered man, these gains weighed upon his soul like the loathsome body of a dead cat. Never in his whole life had he felt so poor as with this devil's money. The witch-bait which Biberli had given him with the two and the five had drawn it out of the pockets of his fellow gamblers. He would be neither a cut-purse nor a dealer in the black arts. The wages of hell should depart as quickly as they came. While speaking, he seized the second largest bag and gave it to the servant, exclaiming: "Now keep your promise to Kätterle like an honest man. The poor thing will have a hard time at her employer's. I make but one condition: you are to remain in my service. I can't do without you."

While the armour-bearer, in the agile Biberli's place, was handing him the garments to be worn in the house, Heinz again remembered how the faithful fellow had thrown himself on his knees and kissed his master's hands and arms in the excess of his joyful surprise, and yet he had felt as if a dark cloud was shadowing the brightness of

his soul. The morning sun had shone so radiantly into his window, and Annele had come with such bewitching shyness to bring him a little bunch of lilies of the valley with a rose in the centre, and a pleasant morning greeting from her mother, that the cloud could not remain, yet it had only parted occasionally to close again speedily, though it was less dense and dark than before.

Yet he had taken the child in his arms and looked down into the narrow street to show her the people going to market so gaily in the early morning. But he soon put her down again, for he recognised in a horseman approaching on a weary steed Count Curt Gleichen, the most intimate friend of young Prince Hartmann and himself, and when he called to him he had slid from his saddle with a faint greeting.

Heinz instantly rushed out of the house to meet him, but he had found him beside his steed, which had sunk on its knees, and then, trembling and panting, dragged itself, supported by its rider's hand, into the entry. There it fell, rolled over on its side, and stretched its limbs stiffly in death. It was the third horse which the messenger had killed since he left the Rhine, yet he was sure of arriving too soon; for he had to announce to a father the death of his promising son.

Heinz listened, utterly overwhelmed, to the narrative of the eye-witness, who described how Hartmann, ere he could stretch out a hand to save

him, had been dragged into the depths by the waves of the Rhine.

In spite of the sunny brightness of the morning the young Swiss had had a presentiment of some great misfortune, and had told himself that he would welcome it if it relieved him from the burden which had darkened his soul since the disgraceful good luck of the previous night. Now it had happened, and how gladly he would have continued to bear the heaviest load to undo the past. He had sobbed on his friend's breast like a child, accusing Heaven for having visited him with this affliction.

Hartmann had been not only his friend but his pupil—and what a pupil! He had instructed him in horsemanship and the use of the sword, and during the last year shared everything with him and young Count Gleichen as if they were three brothers and, like a brother, the prince had constantly grown closer to his heart. Had he, Heinz, accompanied Hartmann to the Rhine and been permitted to remain with him, neither or both would have fallen victims to the river! And Hartmann's aged father, the noble man to whom he owed everything, and who clung with his whole soul to the beloved youth, his image in mind and person—how would the Emperor Rudolph endure this? But a few months ago death had snatched from him his wife, the love of his youth, the mother of his children, the companion of his glorious career! The thought of

him stirred Heinz to the depths of his soul, and he would fain have hastened at once to the castle to help the stricken father bear the new and terrible burden imposed upon him. But he must first care for the messenger of these terrible tidings who, with lips white from exhaustion, needed refreshment.

Biberli, who saw and thought of everything, had already urged the hostess to do what she could, and sent the servant to the tailor that, when Heinz rode to the fortress, he might not lack the mourning—a tabard would suffice—which could be made in a few hours.

Frau Barbara had just brought the lunch and promised to obey the command to keep the terrible news which she had just heard a secret from every one, that the rumor might not reach the fortress prematurely, when another visitor appeared—Heinz Schorlin's cousin, Sir Arnold Maier of Silenen, a tall, broad-shouldered man of fifty, with stalwart frame and powerful limbs.

His grave, bronzed countenance, framed by a grey beard, revealed that he, too, brought no cheering news. He had never come to his young cousin's at so early an hour.

His intelligent, kindly grey eyes surveyed Heinz with astonishment. What had befallen the happy-hearted fellow? But when he heard the news which had wet the young knight's eyes with tears, his own lips also quivered, and his deep,

manly tones faltered as he laid his heavy hands on the mourner's shoulders and gazed tearfully into his eyes. At last he exclaimed mournfully: "My poor, poor boy! Pray to Him to whom we owe all that is good, and who tries us with the evil. Would to God I had less painful tidings for you!"

Heinz shrank back, but his cousin told him the tidings learned from a Swiss messenger scarcely an hour before. The dispute over the bridge toll had caused a fight. The uncle who supplied a father's place to Heinz and managed his affairs—brave old Walther Ramsweg—was killed; Schorlin Castle had been taken by the city soldiery and, at the command of the chief magistrate, razed to the ground. Wendula Schorlin, Heinz's mother, with her daughter Maria, had fallen into the hands of the city soldiers and been carried to the convent in Constance, where she and her youngest child now remained with the two older daughters.

Heinz, deeply agitated by the news, exclaimed: "Uncle Ramsweg, our kind second father, also in the grave without my being able to press his brave, loyal hand in farewell! And Maria, our singing bird, our nimble little squirrel, with those grave, world-weary Sisters! And my mother! You, too, like every one, love her, Cousin—and you know her. She who has been accustomed to command, and to manage the house and the lands, who like a saint dried tears far and near amid trouble

and deprivation—she, deprived of her own strong will, in a convent! Oh, Cousin, Cousin! To hear this, and not be able to rush upon the rabble who have robbed us of the home of our ancestors, as a boy crushes a snail shell! Can it be imagined? No Castle Schorlin towering high above the lake on the cliff at the verge of the forest. The room where we all saw the light of the world and listened to our mother's songs destroyed; the sacred chamber where the father who so lovingly protected us closed his eyes; the chapel where we prayed so devoutly and vowed to the Holy Virgin a candle from our little possessions, or, in the lovely month of May, brought flowers to her from our mother's little garden, the cliff, or the dark forest. The courtyard where we learned to manage a steed and use our weapons, the hall where we listened to the wandering minstrels, in ruins! Gone, gone, all gone! My mother and Maria weeping prisoners!"

Here his cousin broke in to show him that love was leading him to look on the dark side. His mother had chosen the convent for her daughter's sake; she was by no means detained there by force. She could live wherever she pleased, and her dowry, with what she had saved, would be ample to support her and Maria, in the city or the country, in a style suited to their rank.

This afforded Heinz some consolation, but enough remained to keep his grief alive, and his

voice sounded very sorrowful as he added: "That lessens the bitterness of the cup. But who will rebuild the ancient castle? Who will restore our uncle? And the Emperor, my beloved, fatherly master, dying of grief! Our Hartmann dead! Washed away like a dry branch which the swift Reuss seizes and hurries out of our sight! Too much, too hard, too terrible! Yet the sun shines as brightly as before! The children in the street below laugh as merrily as ever!"

Groaning aloud, he covered his face with his hands, and those from whom he might have expected consolation were forced to leave him in the midst of the deepest sorrow; for the Swiss mail, which had come to Maier of Silenen as the most distinguished of his countrymen, was awaiting distribution, and Count Gleichen was forced to fulfill his sorrowful duty as messenger. His friend Heinz had lent him his second horse, the black, to ride to the fortress.

While Heinz, pursued by grief and care, sometimes paced up and down the room, sometimes threw himself into the armchair which Frau Barbara, to do him special honour, had placed in the sitting-room, the Minorite monk Benedictus, whom he had brought to Nuremberg, had come uninvited from the neighbouring monastery to give him a morning greeting. The enthusiasm with which St. Francis had filled his soul in his early years had not died out in his aged breast. He who in his

youth had borne the escutcheon of his distinguished race in many a battle and tourney, as a knight worthy of all honour, sympathised with his young equal in rank, and found him in the mood to provide for his eternal salvation. On the ride to Nuremberg he had perceived in Heinz a pious heart and a keen intellect which yearned for higher things. But at that time the joyous youth had not seemed to him ripe for the call of Heaven; when he found him bowed with grief, his eyes, so radiant yesterday, swimming in tears, the conviction was aroused that the Omnipotent One Himself had taken him by the hand to lead the young Swiss, to whom he gratefully wished the best blessings, into the path which the noble Saint of Assisi himself had pointed out to him, and wherein he had found a bliss for which in the world he had vainly yearned.

But his conversation with his young friend had been interrupted, first by the tailor who was to make his mourning garb, then by Siebenburg, and even later he had had no opportunity to school Heinz; for after Seitz had gone Biberli and Kätterle had needed questioning. The result of this was sufficiently startling, and had induced Heinz to send the servant and his sweetheart on the errand from which the former had not yet returned.

When the young knight found himself alone he repeated what the monk had just urged upon him. Then Eva's image rose before him, and he had

asked himself whether she, the devout maiden, would not thank her saint when she learned that he, obedient to her counsel, was beginning to provide for his eternal salvation.

Moved by such thoughts, he had smiled as he told himself that the Minorite seemed to be earnestly striving to win him for the monastery. The old man meant kindly, but how could he renounce the trade of arms, for which he was reared and which he loved?

Then he had been obliged to ride to the fortress to wait upon the Emperor and tell him how deeply he sympathised with his grief. But he was denied admittance. Rudolph desired to be alone, and would not see even his nearest relatives.

On the way home he wished to pass through the inner gate of the Thiergärtnerthor into Thorstrasse to cross the milk market. The violence of the noonday thundershower had already begun to abate, and he had ridden quietly forward, absorbed in his grief, when suddenly a loud, rattling crash had deafened his ears and made him feel as if the earth, the gate, and the fortress were reeling. At the same moment his horse leaped upward with all four feet at once, tossed its clever head convulsively, and sank on its knees.

Half blinded by the dazzling light he saw, and bewildered by the sulphurous vapour he noticed, Heinz nevertheless retained his presence of mind, and had sprung from the saddle ere the quivering

steed fell on its side. Several of the guard at the gate quickly hastened to his assistance, examined the horse with him, and found the noble animal already dead. The lightning had darted along the iron mail on its forehead and the steel bit, and struck the ground without injuring Heinz himself. The soldiers and a Dominican monk who had sought shelter from the rain in the guardhouse extolled this as a great miracle. The people who had crowded to the spot were also seized with pious awe, and followed the knight to whom Heaven had so distinctly showed its favour.

Heinz himself only felt that something extraordinary had happened. The world had gained a new aspect. His life, which yesterday had appeared so immeasurably long, now seemed brief, pitifully brief. Perhaps it would end ere the sun sank to rest in the Haller meadows. He must deem every hour that he was permitted to breathe as a gift, like the earnest money he placed in the trainer's hand in a horse trade. According to human judgment the lightning should have killed him as well as the horse. If he still lived and breathed and saw the grey clouds drifting across the sky, this was granted only that he might secure his eternal salvation, to which hitherto he had given so little concern. How grateful he ought to be that this respite had been allowed him—that he had not been snatched away unwarned, like Prince Hartmann, in the midst of his sins!

Would not Eva feel the same when she learned what had befallen him? Perhaps Biberli would come back soon—he had been gone so long—and could tell him about her.

Even before the thunderbolt had stirred the inmost depths of his being, when he was merely touched by his deep grief and the monk's admonition, he had striven to guide the servant and his sweetheart into the right path, and the grey-haired monk aided him. The monastic life, it is true, would not have suited Biberli, but he had shown himself ready to atone for the wrong done the poor girl who had kept her troth for three long years and, unasked, went back with her to her angry master.

Ere Heinz set forth on his ride to the fortress he had gone out declaring that he would prove the meaning of his truth and steadfastness, thereby incurring a peril which certainly gave him a right to wear the T and St on his long robe and cap forever. He must expect to be held to a strict account by Ernst Ortlieb. If the incensed father, who was a member of the Council, used the full severity of the law, he might fare even worse than ill. But he had realised the pass to which he had brought his sweetheart, and the Minorite led his honest heart to the perception of the sin he would commit if he permitted her to atone for an act which she had done by his desire—nay, at his command.

With the gold Heinz had given him, and after his assurance that he would retain him in his service even when a married man, he could, it is true, more easily endure being punished with her who, as his wife, would soon be destined to share evil with him as well as good. He had also secured the aid of both his master and the Minorite, and had arranged an account of what had occurred, which placed his own crime and the maid's in a milder light. Finally—and he hoped the best result from this—Kätterle would bring the Ortliebs good news, and he was the very man to make it useful to Jungfrau Els.

So he had committed his destiny to his beloved master, behind whom was the Emperor himself, to the Minorite, who, judging from his great age and dignified aspect, might be an influential man, St. Leodogar, and his own full purse and, with a heart throbbing anxiously, entered the street with the closely muffled Kätterle, to take the unpleasant walk to the exasperated master and father.

The morning had been rife with important events to Biberli also. The means of establishing a household, the conviction that it would be hard for him to remain a contented man without the idol of his heart, and the still more important one that it would not be wise to defer happiness long, because, as the death of young Prince Hartmann had shown, and Pater Benedictus made still more

evident, the possibility of enjoying the pleasures of life might be over far too speedily.

He had been within an ace of losing his Kätterle forever, and through no one's guilt save that of the man on whose truth and steadfastness she so firmly relied. After Siebenburg's departure she had confessed with tears to him, his master, and the monk, what had befallen her, and how she had finally reached the Bindergasse and Sir Heinz Schorlin's lodgings.

When, during the conflagration, fearing punishment, she had fled, she went first to the Dutzen pond. Determined to end her existence, she reached the goal of her nocturnal and her life pilgrimage. The mysterious black water with its rush-grown shore, where ducks quacked and frogs croaked in the sultry gloom, lay before her in the terrible darkness. After she had repeated several Paternosters, the thought that she must die without receiving the last unction weighed heavily on her soul. But this she could not help, and it seemed more terrible to stand in the stocks, like the barber's widow, and be insulted, spit upon by the people, than to endure the flames of purgatory, where so many others—probably among them Biberli, who had brought her to this pass—would be tortured with her.

So she laid down the bundle which—she did not know why herself—she had brought with her, and took off her shoes as if she were going into the

water to bathe. Just at that moment she suddenly saw a red light glimmering on the dark surface of the water. It could not be the reflection of the fires of purgatory, as she had thought at first. It certainly did not proceed from the forge on the opposite shore, now closed, for its outlines rose dark and motionless against the moon. No—a brief glance around verified it—the light came from the burning of the convent. The sky was coloured a vivid scarlet in two places, but the glow was brightest towards the southeastern part of the city, where St. Klarengasse must be. Then she was overpowered by torturing curiosity. Must she die without knowing how much the fire had injured the newly built convent, on whose site she had enjoyed the springtime of love, and how the good Sisters fared? It seemed impossible, and her greatest fault for the first time proved a blessing. It drew her back from the Dutzen pond to the city.

On reaching the Marienthurm she learned that only a barn and a cow stable had been destroyed by the flames. For this trivial loss she had suffered intense anxiety and been faithless to her resolution to seek death, which ends all fears.

Vexed by her own weakness, she determined to go back to her employer's house and there accept whatever fate the saints bestowed. But when she saw a light still shining through the parchment panes in the room occupied by the two Es, she

imagined that Herr Ernst was pronouncing judgment upon Eva. In doing so her own guilt must be recalled, and the thought terrified her so deeply that she joined the people returning from the fire, for whom the Frauenthor still stood open, and allowed the crowd to carry her on with them to St. Kunigunde's chapel in St. Lawrence's church; and when some, passing the great Imhof residence, turned into the Kotgasse, she followed.

Hitherto she had walked on without goal or purpose, but here the question where to seek shelter confronted her; for the torchbearers who had lighted the way disappeared one after another in the various houses. Deep darkness suddenly surrounded her, and she was seized with terror. But ere the last torch vanished, its light fell upon one of the brass basins which hung in front of the barbers' shops.

The barber! The woman whom she had seen in the stocks was the widow of one, and the house where she granted the lovers the meeting, on whose account she had been condemned to so severe a punishment, was in the Kotgasse, and had been pointed out to her. It must be directly opposite.

The thought entered her mind that the woman who had endured such a terrible punishment, for a crime akin to her own, would understand better than any one else the anguish of her heart. How could the widow yonder refuse her companion in guilt a compassionate reception!

It was a happy idea, but she would never have ventured to rouse the woman from her sleep, so she must wait. But the first grey light of dawn was already appearing in the eastern horizon on the opposite side of the square of St. Lawrence, and perhaps Frau Ratzer would open her house early.

The street did honour to the name of Kotgasse.* Holding her dress high around her, Kätterle waded across to the northern row of houses and reached the plank sidewalk covered with mud to her ankles; but at the same moment a door directly in front of her opened, and two persons, a man and a woman, entered the street and glided by; but they came from Frau Ratzer's—she recognised it by the bow-window above the entrance. The maid hurried towards the door, which still stood open, and on its threshold was the woman to whom she intended to pay her early visit.

Almost unable to speak, she entreated her to grant a poor girl, who did not know where to seek shelter at this hour, the protection of her house.

The widow silently drew Kätterle into the dark, narrow entry, shut the door, and led her into a neat, gaily ornamented room. A lamp which was still burning hung from the ceiling, but Frau Ratzer raised the tallow candle she had carried to the door, threw its light upon her face, and nodded

* *Kot* or *koth*—mire.

approvingly. Kätterle was a pretty girl, and the flush of shame which crimsoned her cheeks was very becoming. The widow probably thought so, too, for she stroked them with her fat hand, promising, as she did so, to receive her and let her want for nothing if she proved an obedient little daughter. Then she pinched the girl's arm with the tips of her fingers so sharply that she shrank back and timidly told the woman what had brought her there, saying that she was and intended to remain a respectable girl, and had sought shelter with Frau Ratzer because she knew what a sore disgrace she had suffered for the same fault which had driven her from home.

But the widow, starting as if stung by a scorpion, denounced Kätterle as an impudent hussy, who rightfully belonged in the stocks, to which the base injustice of the money-bags in the court had condemned her. There was no room in her clean house for anyone who reminded her of this outrage and believed that she had really committed so shameful an act. Then, seizing the maid by the shoulders, she pushed her into the street.

Meanwhile it had grown light. The sun had just risen in the east above the square of St. Lawrence and spread a golden fan of rays over the azure sky. The radiant spectacle did not escape the eyes of the frightened girl, and she rejoiced because it gave her the assurance that the terrifying darkness of the night was over.

How fresh the morning was, how clear and beautiful the light of the young day! And it shone not only on the great and the good, but on the lowly, the poor, and the wicked. Even for the horrible woman within the sky adorned itself with the exquisite blue and glorious brilliancy.

Uttering a sigh of relief she soon reached the Church of St. Lawrence, which the old sexton was just opening. She was the first person who entered the stately house of God that morning and knelt in one of the pews to pray.

This had been the right thing for her to do. Dear Lord! Where was there any maid in greater trouble, yet Heaven had preserved her from the death on a red-hot gridiron which had rendered St. Lawrence, whose name the church bore, a blessed martyr. Compared with that, even standing in the pillory was not specially grievous. So she poured out her whole soul to the saint, confessing everything which grieved and oppressed her, until the early mass began. She had even confided to him that she was from Sarnen in Switzerland, and had neither friend nor countryman here in Nuremberg save her lover, the true and steadfast Biberli. Yet no! There was one person from her home who probably would do her a kindness, the wife of the gatekeeper in the von Zollern castle, a native of Berne, who had come to Nuremberg and the fortress as the maid of the Countess Elizabeth of Hapsburg, the present Burgravine. This ex-

cellent woman could give her better counsel than any one, and she certainly owed the recollection of Frau Gertrude to her patron saint.

After a brief thanksgiving she left the church and went to the fortress.

As she expected, her countrywoman received her kindly; and after Kätterle had confided everything to her, and in doing so mentioned Wolff Eysvogel, the betrothed husband of the elder of her young mistresses, Frau Gertrude listened intently and requested her to wait a short time.

Yet one quarter of an hour after another elapsed before she again appeared. Her husband, the Bernese warder, a giant of a man to whom the red and yellow Swiss uniform and glittering halberd he carried in his hand were very becoming, accompanied his wife.

After briefly questioning Kätterle, he exacted a solemn promise of secrecy and then motioned to her to follow him. Meanwhile the maid had been informed how the duel between Wolff Eysvogel and Ulrich Vorchtel had ended, but while she still clasped her hands in horror, the Swiss had opened the door of a bright, spacious apartment, where Els Ortlieb's betrothed husband received her with a kind though sorrowful greeting. Then he continued his writing, and at last gave her two letters. One, on whose back he drew a little heart, that she might not mistake it for the other, was addressed to his betrothed bride; the second to Heinz Schor-

lin, whom Wolff—no, her ears did not deceive her—called the future husband of his sister-in-law Eva.

At breakfast, which she shared with her country people and their little daughter, Kätterle would have liked to learn how Wolff reached the fortress, but the gatekeeper maintained absolute silence on this subject.

The maid at last, without hindrance, reached the Deichsler house and found Biberli at home. She ought to have returned to the Ortliebs in his company long before, but the knight still vainly awaited his servant's appearance. He missed him sorely, since it did not enter his head that his faithful shadow, Biberli, knew nothing of the thunderbolt which had almost robbed him of his master and killed his pet, the dun horse. Besides, he was anxious about his fate and curious to learn how he had found the Ortlieb sisters; for, though Eva alone had power to make Heinz Schorlin's heart beat faster, the misfortune of poor Els affected him more deeply as the thought that he was its cause grew more and more painful.

Wolff's letter, which Kätterle delivered to him, revealed young Eysvogel's steadfast love for the hapless girl. In it he also alluded to his nocturnal interview with Heinz, and in cordial words admitted that he thought he had found in him a sincere friend, to whom, if to any one, he would not grudge his fair young sister-in-law Eva. Then he described how the unfortunate duel had occurred.

After mentioning what had excited young Ulrich Vorchtel's animosity, he related that, soon after his interview with Heinz, he had met young Vorchtel, accompanied by several friends. Ulrich had barred his way, loading him with invectives so fierce and so offensive to his honour, that he was obliged to accept the challenge. As he wore no weapon save the dagger in his belt, he used the sword which a German knight among Ulrich's companions offered him. Calm in the consciousness that he had given his former friend's sister no reason to believe in his love, and firmly resolved merely to bestow a slight lesson on her brother, he took the weapon. But when Ulrich shouted to the crusader that the blade he lent was too good for the treacherous hand he permitted to wield it, his blood boiled, and with his first powerful thrust all was over.

The German knight had then introduced himself as a son of the Burgrave von Zollern and taken him to the castle, where, with his father's knowledge, the noble young Knight Hospitaller concealed him, and the point now was to show the matter, which was undoubtedly a breach of the peace, to the Emperor Rudolph in the right light. The young Burgrave thought that he, Heinz Schorlin, could aid in convincing the sovereign, who would lend him a ready ear, that he, Wolff, had only drawn his sword under compulsion. So truly as Heinz himself hoped to be a happy man

through Eva's love, he must help him to bridge the chasm which, by his luckless deed, separated him from his betrothed bride.

Heinz had had this letter read aloud twice. Then when Biberli had gone and he rode to the fortress, he had resolved to do everything in his power for the young Nuremberg noble who had so quickly won his regard, but the sorely stricken imperial father had refused to see him, and therefore it was impossible to take any step in the matter.

Yet Wolff's letter had showed that he believed him in all earnestness to be Eva's future husband, and thus strengthened his resolve to woo her as soon as he felt a little more independent.

After the thunderbolt had killed the horse under him, and the old Minorite had again come and showed him that the Lord Himself, through the miracle He had wrought, had taken him firmly and swiftly by the hand as His chosen follower, it seemed to his agitated mind, when he took up the letter a second time, as though everything Wolff had written about him and Els's sister was not intended for him.

Eva was happiness—but Heaven had vouchsafed a miracle to prove the transitoriness of earthly life, that by renunciation here he might attain endless bliss above. Sacrifice and again sacrifice, according to the Minorite, was the magic

spell that opened the gates of heaven, and what harder sacrifice could he offer than that of his love? "Renounce! renounce!" he heard a voice within cry in his ears as, with much difficulty, he himself read Wolff's letter, but whatever he might cast away of all that was his, he still would fail to take up his cross as Father Benedictus required; for even as an unknown beggar he would have enjoyed—this he firmly believed—in Eva's love the highest earthly bliss. Yet divine love was said to be so much more rapturous, and how much longer it endured!

And she? Did not the holy expression of her eyes and the aspiration of her own soul show that she would understand him, approve his sacrifice, imitate it, and exchange earthly for heavenly love? Neither could renounce it without inflicting deep wounds on the heart, but every drop of blood which gushed from them, the Minorite said, would add new and heavy weight to their claim to eternal salvation.

Ay, Heinz would try to resign Eva! But when he yielded to the impulse to read Wolff's letter again he felt like a dethroned prince whom some stranger, ignorant of his misfortune, praises for his mighty power.

The visions of the future which the grey-haired monk conjured up, all that he told him of his own regeneration, transformation, and the happiness which he would find as a dis-

ciple of St. Francis in poverty, liberty, and the silent struggle for eternal bliss, everything which he described with fervid eloquence, increased the tumult in the young knight's deeply agitated soul.

END OF VOLUME I.

GEORG EBERS

IN THE FIRE OF THE FORGE

THE HISTORICAL ROMANCES OF
GEORG EBERS

IN THE FIRE OF THE FORGE

A ROMANCE OF OLD NUREMBERG

VOLUME TWO

Translated from the German by
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IN THE FIRE OF THE FORGE.

CHAPTER I.

The vesper bells had already died away, yet Heinz was still listening eagerly to the aged Minorite, who was now relating the story of St. Francis, his breach with everything that he loved, and the sorrowful commencement of his life. The monk could have desired no more attentive auditor. Only the young knight often looked out of the window in search of Biberli, who had not yet returned.

The latter had gone to the Ortlieb mansion with Kätterle.

The runaway maid, whose disappearance, at old Martsche's earnest request, had already been "cried" in the city, had no cause to complain of her reception; for the housekeeper and the other servants, who knew nothing of her guilt, greeted her as a favourite companion whom they had greatly missed, and Biberli had taken care that she was provided with answers to the questions of the in-

quisitive. The story which he had invented began with the false report that a fire had broken out in the fortress. This had startled Kätterle, and attracted her to the citadel to aid her countrywoman and her little daughter. Then came the statement that she spent the night there, and lastly the tale that in the morning she was detained in the Swiss warder's quarters by a gentleman of rank—perhaps the Burgrave himself—who, after he had learned who she was, wished to give her some important papers for Herr Ernst Ortlieb. She had waited hours for them and finally, on the way home, chanced to meet Biberli.

At first the maid found it difficult to repeat this patchwork of truth and fiction in proper order, but the ex-schoolmaster impressed it so firmly on his sweetheart's mind that at last it flowed from her lips as fluently as his pupils in Stanstadt had recited the alphabet.

So she became among the other servants the heroine of an innocent adventure whose truth no one doubted, least of all the housekeeper, who felt a maternal affection for her. Some time elapsed ere she could reach the Es; they were still with their mother, who was so ill that the leech Otto left the sick-room shaking his head.

As soon as he had gone Biberli stopped Els, who had accompanied the physician outside the door of the sufferer's chamber, and earnestly entreated her to forgive him and Kätterle—who stood at his side

with drooping head, holding her apron to her eyes—and persuade her father also to let mercy take the place of justice.

But kind-hearted Els proved sterner than the maid had ever seen her.

As her mother had been as well as usual when she woke, they had told her of the events of the previous night. Her father was very considerate, and even kept back many incidents, but the invalid was too weak for so unexpected and startling a communication. She was well aware of her excitable daughter's passionate nature; but she had never expected that her little "saint," the future bride of Heaven, would be so quickly fired with earthly love, especially for a stranger knight. Moreover, the conduct of Eva who, though she entreated her forgiveness, by no means showed herself contritely ready to resign her lover, had given her so much food for thought that she could not find the rest her frail body required.

Soon after these disclosures she was again attacked with convulsions, and Els thought of them and the fact that they were caused by Eva's imprudence, instigated by the maid, when she refused Biberli her intercession with her father in behalf of him and his bride, as he now called Kätterle.

The servitor uttered a few touching exclamations of grief, yet meanwhile thrust his hand into the pocket of his long robe and, with a courteous bow and the warmest message of love from her be-

trothed husband, whom Kätterle had seen in perfect health and under the best care in the Zollern castle, delivered to the indignant girl the letter which Wolff had entrusted to the maid. Els hurried with the missive so impatiently expected to the window in the hall, through which the sun, not yet reached by the rising clouds, was shining, and as it contained nothing save tender words of love which proved that her betrothed husband firmly relied upon her fidelity and, come what might, would not give her up, she returned to the pair, and hurriedly, but in a more kindly tone, informed them that her father was greatly incensed against both, but she would try to soften him. At present he was in his office with Herr Casper Eysvogel; Biberli might wait in the kitchen till the latter went away.

Els then entered the sick-chamber, but Biberli put his hand under his sweetheart's chin, bent her head back gently, and said: "Now you see how Biberli and other clever people manage. The best is kept until the last. The result of the first throw matters little, only he who wins the last goes home content. To know how to choose the bait is also an art. The trout bites at the fly, the pike at the worm, and a yearning maiden at her lover's letter. Take notice! To-day, which began with such cruel sorrow, will yet have a tolerable end."

"Nay," cried Kätterle, nudging him angrily with her elbow, "we never had a day begin more hap-

pily for us. The gold with which we can set up housekeeping——"

"Oh, yes," interrupted Biberli, "the zecchins and gold florins are certainly no trifle. Much can be bought with them. But Schorlin Castle razed to the ground, my master's lady mother and Fräulein Maria held as half captives in the convent, to say nothing of the light-hearted Prince Hartmann and Sir Heinz's piteous grief—if all these things could be undone, child, I should not think the bag of gold, and another into the bargain, too high a price to pay for it. What is the use of a house filled with fine furniture when the heart is so full of sorrow? At home we all eat together out of a cracked clay dish across which a tinker had drawn a wire, with rude wooden spoons made by my father, yet how we all relished it!—what more did we want?"

As he spoke he drew her into the kitchen, where he found a friendly reception.

True, the Ortlieb servants were attached to their employers and sincerely sorry for the ill health of the mistress of the house, but for several years the lamentations and anxiety concerning her had been ceaseless. The young prince's death had startled rather than saddened them. They did not know him, but it was terrible to die so young and so suddenly. They would not have listened to a merry tale which stirred them to laughter, but Biberli's stories of distant lands, of the

court, of war, of the tournament, just suited their present mood, and the narrator was well pleased to find ready listeners. He had so many things to forget, and he never succeeded better than when permitted to use his tongue freely. He wagged it valiantly, too, but when the thunderstorm burst he paused and went to the window. His narrow face was blanched, and his agile limbs moved restlessly. Suddenly remarking, "My master will need me," he held out his hand to Kätterle in farewell. But as the zigzag flash of lightning had just been followed by the peal of thunder, she clung to him, earnestly beseeching him not to leave her. He yielded, but went out to learn whether Herr Casper was still in the office, and in a short time returned, exclaiming angrily: "The old Eysvogel seems to be building his nest here!"

Then, to the vexation of the clumsy old cook, whom he interrupted by his restless movements in the Paternosters she was repeating on her rosary, he began to stride up and down before the hearth.

His light heart had rarely been so heavy. He could not keep his thoughts from his master, and felt sure that Heinz needed him; that he, Biberli, would have cause to regret not being with him at this moment. Had the storm destroyed the Ortlieb mansion he would have considered it only natural; and as he glanced around the kitchen in search of Kätterle, who, like most of the others,

was on her knees with her rosary in her hand, old Martsche rushed in, hurried up to the cook, shook her as if to rouse her from sleep, and exclaimed: "Hot water for the blood-letting! Quick! Our mistress—she'll slip through our hands."

As she spoke, the young kitchen maid Metz helped the clumsy woman up, and Biberli also lent his aid.

Just as the jug was filled, Els, too, hastened in, snatched it from the hand of Martsche, whose old feet were too slow for her, and hurried with it into the entry and up the stairs, passing her father, to whom she had called on the way down.

Casper Eysvogel stood at the bottom of the steps, and called after her that it would not be his fault, but her father's, if everything between her and his son was over.

She probably heard the words, but made no answer, and hastened as fast as her feet would carry her to her mother's bed.

The old physician was holding the gasping woman in his arms, and Eva knelt beside the high bedstead sobbing, as she covered the dry, burning hand with kisses.

When Ernst Ortlieb entered the chamber of his beloved wife a cold chill ran down his back, for the odour of musk, which he had already inhaled beside many a deathbed, reached him.

It had come to this! The end which he had so long delayed by tender love and care was approach-

ing. The flower which had adorned his youth and, spite of its broken stem, had grown still dearer and was treasured beyond everything else that bloomed in his garden, would be torn from him.

This time no friendly potion had helped her to sleep through the noise of the thunderstorm. Soon after the attack of convulsions the agitated, feeble sufferer had started up in terror at the first loud peal of thunder. Fright followed fright, and when the leech came voluntarily to enquire for her, he found a dying woman.

The bleeding restored her to consciousness for a short time, and she evidently recognised her husband and her children. To the former she gave a grateful, tender glance of love, to Els an affectionate, confidential gesture, but Eva, her pride and joy, whom the past night had rendered a child of sorrow, claimed her attention most fully.

Her kind, gentle eyes rested a long time upon her; then she looked toward her husband as if beseeching him to cherish this child with special tenderness in his heart; and when he returned the glance with another, in which all the wealth of his great and loyal love shone through his tears, her fever-flushed features brightened. Memories of the spring of her love seemed to irradiate her last moments and, as her eyes again rested on Eva, her lips once more smiled with the bewitching expression, once her husband's delight, which had long deserted them.

It seemed during this time as if she had forgotten the faithful nurse who for years had willingly sacrificed the pleasures of her days and the sleep of her nights, to lavish upon the child of her anxiety all that her mother-heart still contained, which was naught save love.

Els doubtless noticed it, but with no bitter or sorrowful thoughts. She and the beloved dying woman understood one another. Each knew what she was to the other. Her mother need not doubt, nor did she, that, whatever obstacles life might place in her pathway, Els would pursue the right course even without counsel and guidance. But Eva needed her love and care so much just now, and when the sufferer gave her older daughter also a tender glance and vainly strove to falter a few words of thanks, Els herself replaced in Eva's the hand which her mother had withdrawn.

Frau Maria nodded gently to Els, as if asking her sensible elder daughter to watch over her forsaken sister in her place.

Then her eyes again sought her husband, but the priest, to whom she had just confessed, approached her instead.

After the holy man had performed the duties of his office, she again turned her head toward Eva. It seemed as though she was feasting her eyes on her daughter's charms. Meanwhile she strove to utter what more she desired to say, but the bystanders understood only the words—they were

her last: "We thought—should be untouched——But now Heaven——"

Here she paused and, after closing her eyes for a time, went on in a lower but perfectly distinct tone: "You are good—I hope—the forge—fire of life—it is fortunate for you—— The heart and its demands—— The hap—pi—ness—which it—gave—me—— It ought—it must—you, too——"

Whilst speaking she had again glanced towards her husband, then at the Abbess Kunigunde, who knelt beside him, and as the abbess met the look she thought, "She is entrusting the child to me, and desires Eva to be happy as one of us and the fairest of the brides of Heaven!" Ernst Ortlieb, wholly overpowered by the deepest grief, was far from enquiring into the meaning of these last words of his beloved dying wife.

Els, on the contrary, who had learned to read the sufferer's features and understood her even without words when speech was difficult, had watched every change in the expression of her features with the utmost attention. Without reflecting or interpreting, she was sure that the movements of her dying mother's lips had predicted to Eva that the "forge fire of life" would exert its purifying and moulding influence on her also, and wished that in the world, not in the convent, she might be as happy as she herself had been rendered by her father's love.

After these farewell words Frau Maria's fea-

tures became painfully distorted, the lids drooped over her eyes, there was a brief struggle, then a slight gesture from the physician announced to the weeping group that her earthly pilgrimage was over.

No one spoke. All knelt silently, with clasped hands, beside the couch, until Eva, as if roused from a dream, shrieked, "She will never come back again!" and with passionate grief threw herself upon the lifeless form to kiss the still face and beseech her to open her dear eyes once more and not leave her.

How often she had remained away from the invalid in order to let her aunt point out the path for her own higher happiness whilst Els nursed her mother; but now that she had left her, she suddenly felt what she had possessed and lost in her love. It seemed as if hitherto she had walked beneath the shadow of leafy boughs, and her mother's death had stripped them all away as an autumn tempest cruelly tears off the foliage. Henceforth she must walk in the scorching sun without protection or shelter. Meanwhile she beheld in imagination fierce flames blazing brightly from the dark soot—the forge fire of life, to which the dead woman's last words had referred. She knew what her mother had wished to say, but at the present time she lacked both the desire and the strength to realise it.

For a time each remained absorbed by individ-

ual grief. Then the father drew both girls to his heart and confessed that, with their mother's death life, already impoverished by the loss of his only son, had been bereft of its last charm. His most ardent desire was to be summoned soon to follow the departed ones.

Els summoned up her courage and asked: "And we—are we nothing to you, father?"

Surprised by this rebuke, he started, removed his wet handkerchief from his eyes, and answered: "Yes, yes—but the old do not reckon—— Ay, much is left to me. But he who is robbed of his best possession easily forgets the good things remaining, and good you both are."

He kissed his daughter lovingly as he spoke, as if wishing to retract the words which had wounded her; then gazing at the still face of the dead, he said: "Before you dress her, leave her alone with me for a time—— There is a wild turmoil here and here"—he pointed to his breast and brow—"and yet—— The last hours—— There is so much to settle and consider in a future without her—— With her, with her dear calm features before my eyes——"

Here a fresh outburst of grief stifled his voice; but Els pointed to the image of the Virgin on the wall and beckoned to her sister.

Wholly engrossed by her own sorrow, Eva had scarcely heeded her father's words, and now impetuously refused to leave her mother. Herr Ernst,

pleased by this immoderate grief for the one dearest to him, permitted her to remain, and asked Els to attend to the outside affairs which a death always brought with it.

Els accepted the new duty as a matter of course and went to the door; but at the threshold she turned back, rushed to the deathbed, kissed the pure brow and closed eyelids of the sleeper, and then knelt beside her in silent prayer. When she rose she clasped Eva, who had knelt and risen with her, in a close embrace, and whispered: "Whatever happens, you may rely on me."

Then she consulted her father concerning certain arrangements which must be made, and also asked him what she should say to the maid's lover, who had come to beseech his forgiveness.

"Tell him to leave me in peace!" cried Herr Ernst vehemently. Els tried to intercede for the servant, but her father pressed both hands over his ears, exclaiming: "Who can reach a decision when he is out of his senses himself? Let the man come to-morrow, or the day after. Whoever may call, I will see no one, and don't wish to know who is here."

But the peace and solitude for which he longed seemed denied him. A few hours after he left the chamber of death he was obliged to go to the Town Hall on business which could not be deferred; and when, shortly before sunset, he re-

turned home and locked himself into his own room, old Eysvogel again appeared.

He looked pale and agitated, and ordered the manservant—who denied him admittance as he had been directed—to call Jungfrau Els. His voice trembled as he entreated her to persuade her father to see him again. The matter in question was the final decision of the fate of his ancient house, of Wolff, and also her own and her marriage with his son. Perhaps the death of his beloved wife might render her father's mood more gentle. He did not yet know all—— Now he must learn it. If he again said "No," it would seal the ruin of the Eysvogel firm.

How imploringly he could plead! how humbly the words fell from the old merchant's lips, moving Els to her inmost heart as she remembered the curt inflexibility with which, only yesterday, this arrogant man, in that very spot, had refused any connection with the Ortliebs! How much it must cost him to bow his stiff neck before her, who was so much younger, and approach her father, whose heart he had so pitilessly trampled under foot, in the character of a supplicant for aid, perhaps a beggar!

Besides, Wolff was his son!

Whatever wrong the father had done her she must forget it, and the task was not difficult; for now—she felt it—no matter from what motive, he honestly desired to unite her to his son. If her

lover now led her through the door adorned with the huge, showy escutcheon, she would no longer come as a person unwillingly tolerated, but as a welcome helper—perhaps as the saviour of the imperilled house. Of the women of the Eysvogel family she forbade herself to think.

How touching the handsome, aristocratic, grey-haired man seemed to her in his helpless weakness! If her father would only receive him, he would find it no easier than she to deny him the compassion he so greatly needed.

She knocked at the lonely mourner's door and was admitted.

He was sitting, with his head bowed on his hands, opposite to the large portrait of her dead mother in her bridal robes. The dusk of the gathering twilight concealed the picture, but he had doubtless gazed long at the lovely features, and still beheld them with his mental vision.

Els was received with a mournful greeting; but when Herr Ernst heard what had brought her to him, he fiercely commanded her to tell Herr Casper that he would have nothing more to do with him.

Els interceded for the unfortunate man, begging, pleading, and assuring her father that she would never give up Wolff. The happiness of her whole life was centred in him and his love. If he refused the Eysvogels the aid besought by the old

merchant who, in his humility, seemed a different man——

Here her father indignantly broke in, ordering her to disturb him no longer. But now the heritage of his own nature asserted itself in Els and, with an outburst of indignation, she pointed to the picture of her mother, whose kind heart certainly could not have endured to see a broken-hearted man, on whose rescue the happiness of her own child depended, turned from her door like an importunate beggar.

At this the man whose locks had long been grey sprang from his chair with the agility of a youth, exclaiming in vehement excitement: "To embitter the hours devoted to the most sacred grief is genuine Eysvogel selfishness. Everything for themselves! What do they care for others? I except your Wolff; let the future decide what concerns him and you. I will stand by you. But to hope for happiness and peace—nay, even a life without bitter sorrow for you from the rest of the kin—is to expect to gather sweet pears from juniper bushes. Ever since your betrothal your mother and I have had no sleep, disturbed whenever we talked to each other about your being condemned to live under the same roof with that old devil, the countess, her pitiable daughter, and that worthless Siebenburg. But within the past few hours all this has been changed. The table-cloth has been cut between the Eysvogels and the Ortliebs. No

power in the world can ever join it. I have not told you what has happened. Now you may learn that you—— But first listen, and then decide on whose side you will stand.

"Early this morning I went to the session of the Council. In the market-place I met first one member of it, then a second, third, and fourth; each asked me what had happened to the beautiful E, my lovely little daughter. Gradually I learned what had reached their ears. Yesterday evening, on his way home from here, the man outside, Casper Eysvogel, sullied your—our—good name, child, in a way—— I have just learned the particulars. He boasted, in the presence of those estimable old gentlemen, the Brothers Ebner, that he had flung at my feet the ring which bound you to his son. You had been surprised at midnight, he said, in the arms of a Swiss knight, and that base scoundrel Siebenburg, his daughter's husband, dared at the gaming-table, before a number of knights and gentlemen—among them young Hans Gross, Veit Holzschuher, and others—to put your interview with the Swiss in so false a light that—— No, I cannot bring my lips to utter it—— You need hear only this one thing more: the wretch said that he thanked his patron saint that they had discovered the jade's tricks in time. And this, child, was the real belief of the whole contemptible crew! But now that the water is up to their necks, and they need my helping hand to save

them from drowning—now they will graciously take Ernst Ortlieb's daughter if he will give them his property into the bargain, that they may destroy both fortune and child. No—a thousand times no! It is not seemly, at this hour, to yield to the spirit of hate; but she who is lying in her last sleep above would not have counselled me by a single word to such suicidal folly. I did not learn the worst until I went to the Council, or I would have turned the importunate fellow from the door this morning. Tell the old man so, and add that Ernst Ortlieb will have nothing more to do with him."

Here the deeply incensed father pointed to the door.

Els had listened with eyes dilating in horror. The result surpassed her worst fears.

She had felt so secure in her innocence, and the countess had interceded for her so cleverly that, absorbed by anxieties concerning Eva, Cordula, and her mother, she had already half forgotten the disagreeable incident.

Yet, now that her fair name was dragged through the mire, she could scarcely be angry with those who pointed the finger of scorn at her; for faithlessness to a betrothed lover was an offence as great as infidelity to a husband. Nay, her friends were more ready to condemn a girl who broke her vow than a wife who forgot her duty.

And if Wolff, in his hiding-place in the citadel,

should learn what was said of his Els, to whom yesterday old and young raised their hats in glad yet respectful greeting, would he not believe those who appealed to his own father?

Yet ere she had fully realised this fear, she told herself that it was her duty and her right to thrust it aside. Wolff would not be Wolff if even for a moment he believed such a thing possible. They ought not, *could* not, doubt each other. Though all Nuremberg should listen to the base calumny and turn its back upon her, she was sure of her Wolff. Ay, *he* would cherish her with twofold tenderness when he learned by whom this terrible suffering had been inflicted upon her.

Drawing a long breath, she again fixed her eyes upon her mother's portrait. Had she now rushed out to tell the old man who had so cruelly injured her—oh, it would have lightened her heart!—the wrong he had done and what she thought of him, her mother would certainly have stopped her, saying: "Remember that he is your betrothed husband's father." She would not forget it; she could not even hate the ruined man.

Any effort to change her father's mood now—she saw it plainly—would be futile. Later, when his just anger had cooled, perhaps he might be persuaded to aid the endangered house.

Herr Ernst gazed after her sorrowfully as, with a gesture of farewell, she silently left the

room to tell her lover's father that he had come in vain.

The old merchant was waiting in the entry, where the wails of the servants and the women in the neighbourhood who, according to custom, were beating their brows and breasts and rending their garments, could be heard distinctly.

Deadly pale, as if ready to sink, he tottered towards the door.

When Els saw him hesitate at the top of the few steps leading to the entry, she gave him her arm to support him down. As he cautiously put one foot after the other on the stairs, she wondered how it was possible that this man, whose tall figure and handsome face were cast in so noble a mould, could believe her to be so base; and at the same moment she remembered the words which old Berthold Vorchtel had uttered in her presence to his son Ulrich: "If anything obscure comes between you and a friend, obtain a clear understanding and peace by truth."

Had the young man who had irritated his misjudged friend into crossing swords with him followed this counsel, perhaps he would have been alive now. She would take it herself, and frankly ask Wolff's father what justified him in accusing her of so base a deed.

The lamps were already lighted in the hall, and the rays from the central one fell upon Herr Casper's colourless face, which wore an expression of

despair. But just as her lips parted to ask the question the odour of musk reached her from the death-chamber, whose door Eva had opened. Her mother's gentle face, still in death, rose before her memory, and she was forced to exert the utmost self-control not to weep aloud. Without further reflection she imposed silence upon herself and—yesterday she would not have ventured to do it—threw her arm around Herr Casper's shoulders, gazed affectionately at him, and whispered: "You must not despair, father. You have a faithful ally in this house in Els."

The old man looked down at her in astonishment, but instead of drawing her closer to him he released himself with courteous coldness, saying bitterly: "There is no longer any bond between us and the Ortliebs, Jungfrau Els. From this day forth I am no more your father than you are the bride of my son. Your will may be good, but how little it can accomplish has unfortunately been proved."

Shrugging his shoulders wearily as he spoke, he nodded a farewell and left the house.

Four bearers were waiting outside with the sedan-chair, three servants with torches, and two stout attendants carrying clubs over their shoulders. All wore costly liveries of the Eysvogel colours, and when their master had taken his seat in the gilded conveyance and the men lifted it, Els

heard a weaver's wife, who lived near by, say to her little boy: "That's the rich Herr Eysvogel, Fritzel. He has as much money to spend every hour as we have in a whole year, and he is a very happy man."

CHAPTER II.

Els went back into the house.

The repulse which she had just received caused her bitter sorrow. Her father was right. Herr Casper had treated her kindly from a purely selfish motive. She herself was nothing to him.

But there was so much for her to do that she found little time to grieve over this new trouble.

Eva was praying in the death-chamber for the soul of the beloved dead with some of the nuns from the convent, who had lost in her mother a generous benefactress.

Els was glad to know that she was occupied; it was better that her sister should be spared many of the duties which she was obliged to perform. Whilst arranging with the coffin-maker and the "Hegelein," the sexton and upholsterer, ordering a large number of candles and everything else requisite at the funeral of the mistress of an aristocratic household, she also found time to look after her father and Countess Cordula, who was better. Yet she did not forget her own affairs.

Biberli had returned. He had much to relate; but when forced to admit that nothing was urgent, she requested him to defer it until later, and only commissioned him to go to the castle, greet Wolff in her name, and announce her mother's death; Kätterle would accompany him, in order to obtain admittance through her countryman, the Swiss warder.

Els might have sent one of the Ortlieb servants; but, in the first place, the fugitive's refuge must be concealed, and then she told herself that Biberli, who had witnessed the occurrence of the previous evening, could best inform Wolff of the real course of events. But when she gave him permission to tell her betrothed husband all that he had seen and heard the day before at the Ortlieb mansion, Biberli replied that a better person than he had undertaken to do so. As he left his master, Sir Heinz was just going to seek her lover. When she learned all that had befallen the knight, she would understand that he was no longer himself. Els, however, had no time to listen, and promised to hear his story when he returned; but he was too full of the recent experience to leave it untold, and briefly related how wonderfully Heaven had preserved his master's life. Then he also told her hurriedly that the trouble which had come upon her through Sir Heinz's fault burdened his soul. Therefore he would not let the night pass without at least showing her betrothed husband how he

should regard the gossip of idle tongues if it penetrated to his hiding-place.

Els uttered a sigh of relief. Surely Wolff must trust her! Yet what viciously coloured reports might reach him from the Eysvogels! Now that he would learn the actual truth from the most credible eye-witnesses she no longer dreaded even the worst calumny.

No one appeared at supper except her father.

Eva had begged to be excused. She wished to remain undisturbed; but the world, with rude yet beneficent hand, interrupted even her surrender to her grief for her mother.

The tailor, who protested that, owing to the mourning for young Prince Hartmann, he had fairly "stolen" this hour for the beautiful Ortlieb sisters, came with his assistant, and at the same time a messenger arrived from the cloth-house in the market-place bringing the packages of white stuffs for selection. Then it was necessary to decide upon the pattern and material; the sisters must appear in mourning the next morning at the consecration, and later at the mass for the dead.

Eva had turned to these worldly matters with sincere repugnance, but Els would not release her from giving them due attention.

It was well for her tortured soul and the poor eyes reddened by weeping. But when she again knelt in the chamber of death beside her dear nuns and saw the grey robe, which they all wore,

the wish to don one, which she had so often cherished, again awoke. No other was more pleasing to her Heavenly Bridegroom, and she forbade herself in this hour to think of the only person for whose sake she would gladly have adorned herself. Yet the struggle to forget him constantly recalled him to her mind, no matter how earnestly she strove to shut out his image whenever it appeared. But, after her last conversation, must not her mother have died in the belief that she would not give up her love? And the dead woman's last words? Yet, no matter what they meant, here and now nothing should come between her and the beloved departed. She devoted herself heart and soul to the memory of the longing for her.

Grief for her loss, repentance for not having devoted herself faithfully enough to her, and the hope that in the convent her prayers might obtain a special place in the world beyond for the beloved sleeper, now revived her wish to take the veil. She felt bound to the nuns, who shared her aspirations. When her father came to send her to her rest and asked whether, as a motherless child, she intended to trust his love and care or to choose another mother who was not of this world, she answered quietly with a loving glance at the picture of St. Clare, "As you wish, and she commands."

Herr Ernst kindly replied that she still had ample time to make her decision, and then again urged her to leave the watch beside the dead to

the women who had been appointed to it and the nuns, who desired to remain with the body; but Eva insisted so eagerly upon sharing it that Els, by a significant gesture to her father, induced him to yield.

She kept her sister away whilst the corpse was being laid out and the women were performing their other duties by asking Eva to receive their Aunt Christine, the wife of Berthold Pfinzing, who had hurried to the city from Schweinau as soon as she had news of her sister-in-law's death.

Nothing must cloud the memory of the beloved sufferer in the mind of her child, and Els knew that Frau Christine had been a dear friend of the dead woman, that Eva clung to her like a second mother, and that nothing could reach her sister from her honest heart which would not benefit her. Nor was she mistaken, for the warm, affectionate manner in which the matron greeted the young girl restored her composure; nay, when Frau Christine was obliged to go, because her time was claimed by important duties, she would gladly have detained her.

When Eva, in a calmer mood than before, at last entered the hall where her mother's body now lay in a white silk shroud on the snowy satin pillows, as she was to be placed before the altar for the service of consecration on the morrow, she was again overwhelmed with all the violence of the deepest grief; nay, the burning anguish of her

soul expressed itself so vehemently that the abbess, who had returned whilst the sisters were still taking leave of their Aunt Christine, did not succeed in soothing her until, drawing her aside, she whispered: "Remember our saint, child. He called everything, even the sorest agony, 'Sister Sorrow.' So you, too, must greet sorrow as a sister, the daughter of your heavenly Father. Remember the supreme, loving hand whence it came, and you will bear it patiently."

Eva nodded gratefully, and when grief threatened to overpower her she thought of the saint's soothing words, "Sister Sorrow," and her heart grew calmer.

Els knew how much the emotions of the previous nights must have wearied her, and had permitted her to share the vigil beside the corpse only because she believed that she would be unable to resist sleep. She had slipped a pillow between her back and that of the tall, handsome chair which she had chosen for a seat, but Eva disappointed her expectation; for whatever she earnestly desired she accomplished, and whilst Els often closed her eyes, she remained wide awake. When sleep threatened to overpower her she thought of her mother's last words, especially one phrase, "the forge fire of life," which seemed specially pregnant with meaning. Yet, ere she had reached any definite understanding of its true significance, the cocks began to crow, the song of the

nightingale ceased, and the twittering of the other birds in the trees and bushes in the garden greeted the dawning day.

Then she rose and, smiling, kissed Els, who was sleeping, on the forehead, told Sister Renata that she would go to rest, and lay down on her bed in the darkened chamber.

Whilst praying and reflecting she had thought constantly of her mother. Now she dreamed that Heinz Schorlin had borne her in his strong arms out of the burning convent, as Sir Boemund Altrosen had saved the Countess von Montfort, and carried her to the dead woman, who looked as fresh and well as in the days before her sickness.

When, three hours before noon, she awoke, she returned greatly refreshed to her dead mother. How mild and gentle her face was even now; yet the dear, silent lips could never again give her a morning greeting and, overwhelmed by grief, she threw herself on her knees before the coffin.

But she soon rose again. Her recent slumber had transformed the passionate anguish into quiet sorrow.

Now, too, she could think of external things.

There was little to be done in the last arrangement of the dead, but she could place the delicate, pale hands in a more natural position, and the flowers which the gardener had brought to adorn the coffin did not satisfy her. She knew all that grew in the woods and fields near Nuremberg, and

no one could dispose bouquets more gracefully. Her mother had been especially fond of some of them, and was always pleased when she brought them home from her walks with the abbess or Sister Perpetua, the experienced old doctress of the convent. Many grew in the forest, others on the brink of the water. The beloved dead should not leave the house, whose guide and ornament she had been, without her favourite blossoms.

Eva arranged the flowers brought by the gardener as gracefully as possible, and then asked Sister Perpetua to go to walk with her, telling her father and sister that she wished to be out of doors with the nun for a short time.

She told no one what she meant to do. Her mother's favourite flowers should be her own last gift to her.

Old Martsche received the order to send Ortel, the youngest manservant in the household, a good-natured fellow eighteen years old, with a basket, to wait for her and Sister Perpetua at the weir.

After the thunderstorm of the day before the air was specially fresh and pure; it was a pleasure merely to breathe. The sun shone brightly from the cloudless sky. It was a delightful walk through the meadows and forest over the foot-path which passed near the very Dützen pool, where Kätterle the day before had resolved to seek death. All Nature seemed revived as though

by a refreshing bath. Larks flew heavenward with a low sweet song, from amidst the grain growing luxuriantly for the winter harvest, and butterflies hovered above the blossoming fields. Slender dragon-flies and smaller busy insects flitted buzzing from flower to flower, sucking honey from the brimming calyxes and bearing to others the seeds needed to form fruit. The songs of finches and the twitter of white-throats echoed from many a bush by the wayside.

In the forest they were surrounded by delightful shade animated by hundreds of loud and low voices far away and close at hand. Countless buds were opening under the moss and ferns, strawberries were ripening close to the ground, and the delicate leafy boughs of the bilberry bushes were full of juicy green or red fruit.

Near the weir they heard a loud clanking and echoing, but it had a very different effect from the noise of the city; instead of exciting curiosity there was something soothing in the regularity of the blows of the iron hammer and the monotonous croaking of the frogs.

In this part of the forest, where the fairest flowers grew, the morning dew still hung glittering from the blossoms and grasses. Here it was secluded, yet full of life, and amidst the wealth of sounds in which might be heard the tapping of the woodpecker, the cry of the lapwing, and the call of the distant wood-pigeon, it was so still and peaceful

that Eva's heart grew lighter in spite of her grief.

Sister Perpetua spoke only to answer a question. She sympathised with Eva's thought when she frankly expressed her pleasure in every new discovery, for she knew for whom and with what purpose she was seeking and culling the flowers and, instead of accusing her of want of feeling, she watched with silent emotion the change wrought in the innocent child by the effort to render, in league with Nature, an act of loving service to the one she held dearest.

True, even now grief often rudely assailed Eva's heart. At such times she paused, sighing silently, or exclaimed to her companion, "Ah, if she could be with us!" or else asked thoughtfully if she remembered how her mother had rejoiced over the fragrant orchid or the white water-lily which she had just found.

Sister Perpetua had taken part of the blossoms which she had gathered; but Ortel already stood waiting with the basket, and the house-dog, Wasser, which had followed the young servant, ran barking joyously to meet the ladies. Eva already had flowers enough to adorn the coffin as she desired, and the sun showed that it was time to return.

Hitherto they had met no one. The blossoms could be arranged here in the forest meadow under the shade of the thick hazel-bushes which bordered the pine wood.

After Eva had thrown hers on the grass, she asked the nun to do the same with her own motley bundle.

Between the thicket and the road stood a little chapel which had been erected by the Mendel family on the spot where a son of old Herr Nikolaus had been murdered. Four Frank robber knights had attacked him and the train of waggons he had ridden out to meet, and killed the spirited young man, who fought bravely in their defence.

Such an event would no longer have been possible so near the city. But Eva knew what had befallen the Eysvogel wares and, although she did not lack courage, she started in terror as she heard the tramp of horses' hoofs and the clank of weapons, not from the city, but within the forest.

She hastily beckoned to her companion who, being slightly deaf had heard nothing, to hide with her behind the hazel-bushes, and also told the young servant, who had already placed the basket beside the flowers, to conceal himself, and all three strained their ears to catch the sounds from the wood.

Ortel held the dog by the collar, silenced him, and assured his mistress that it was only another little band of troopers on their way from Altdorf to join the imperial army.

But this surmise soon proved wrong, for the first persons to appear were two armed horsemen, who turned their heads as nimbly as their steeds,

now to the right and now to the left, scanning the thickets along the road distrustfully. After a somewhat lengthy interval the tall figure of an elderly man followed, clad in deep mourning. Beneath his cap, bordered with fine fur, long locks fell to his shoulders, and he was mounted on a powerful Binzgau charger. At his side, on a beautiful spirited bay, rode a very young woman whose pliant figure was extremely aristocratic in its bearing.

As soon as the hazel-bushes and pine trees, which had concealed the noble pair, permitted a view of them, Eva recognised in the gentleman the Emperor Rudolph, and in his companion Duchess Agnes of Austria, his young daughter-in-law, whom she had not forgotten since the dance at the Town Hall. Behind them came several mailed knights, with the emblems of the deepest mourning on their garments and helmets, and among those nearest to the Emperor Eva perceived—her heart almost stood still—the person whom she had least expected to meet here—Heinz Schorlin.

Whilst she was gathering the flowers for her mother's coffin his image had almost vanished from her mind. Now he appeared before her in person, and the sight moved her so deeply that Sister Perpetua, who saw her turn pale and cling to the young pine by her side, attributed her altered expression to fear of robber knights, and

whispered, "Don't be troubled, child; it is only the Emperor."

Neither the first horsemen—guards whom the magistrate, Berthold Pfinzing, Eva's uncle, had assigned to the sovereign without his knowledge, to protect him from unpleasant encounters during his early morning ride—nor the Emperor and his companions could have seen Eva whilst they were passing the chapel; but scarcely had they reached it when the dog Wasser, which had escaped from Ortel's grasp, burst through the hazel copse and, barking furiously, dashed towards the duchess's horse.

The spirited animal leaped aside, but a few seconds later Heinz Schorlin had swung himself from the saddle and dealt the dog so vigorous a kick that it retreated howling into the thicket. Meanwhile he had watched every movement of the bay, and at the right instant his strong hand had grasped its nostrils and forced it to stand.

"Always alert and on the spot at the right time!" cried the Emperor, then added mournfully, "So was our Hartmann, too."

The duchess bent her head in assent, but the grieving father pointed to Heinz, and added: "The boy owed his blithe vigour partly to the healthful Swiss blood with which he was born, but yonder knight, during the decisive years of life, set him the example. Will you dismount, child, and let Schorlin quiet the bay?"

"Oh, no," replied the duchess, "I understand the animal. You have not yet broken the wonderful son of the desert of shying, as you promised. It was not the barking cur, but yonder basket that has dropped from the skies, which frightened him."

She pointed, as she spoke, to the grass near the chapel where, beside Eva's flowers, stood the light willow basket which was to receive them.

"Possibly, noble lady," replied Heinz, patting the glossy neck of the Arabian, a gift to the Emperor Rudolph from the Egyptian Mameluke Sultan Kalaun. "But perhaps the clever creature merely wished to force his royal rider to linger here. Graciously look over yonder, Your Highness; does it not seem as if the wood fairy herself had laid by the roadside for your illustrious Majesty the fairest flowers that bloom in field and forest, mere and moss?"

As he spoke he stooped, selected from the mass of blossoms gathered by Eva those which specially pleased his eye, hastily arranged them in a bouquet, and with a respectful bow presented them to the duchess.

She thanked him graciously, put the nosegay in her belt, and gazed at him with so warm a light in her eyes that Eva felt as if her heart was shrinking as she watched the scene.

Even princesses, who were separated from him by so wide a gulf, could not help favouring this

man. How could she, the simple maiden whom he had assured of his love, ever have been able to give him up?

But she had no time to think and ponder; the Emperor was already riding on with the Bohemian princess, and Heinz went to his horse, whose bridle was held by one of the troopers who followed the train.

Ere he swung himself into the saddle again, however, he paused to reflect.

The thought that he had robbed some flower or herb-gatherer of a portion of the result of her morning's work had entered his mind and, obeying a hasty impulse, he flung a glittering zecchin into the basket.

Eva saw it, and every fibre of her being urged her to step forward, tell him that the flowers were hers, and thank him in the name of the poor for whom she destined his gift; but maidenly diffidence held her in check, although he gave her sufficient opportunity; for when he perceived the image of the Virgin in the Mendel chapel, he crossed himself, removed his helmet, and bending the knee repeated, whilst the others rode on without him, a silent prayer. His brown locks floated around his head, and his features expressed deep earnestness and glowing ardour.

Oh, how gladly Eva would have thrown herself on her knees beside him, clasped his hands, and—nay, not prayed, her heart was throbbing too

stormily for that—rested her head upon his breast and told him that she trusted him, and felt herself one with him in earthly as well as heavenly love!

Whoever prayed thus in solitude had a soul yearning for the loftiest things. Others might say what they chose, she knew him better. This man, from the first hour of their meeting, had loved her with the most ardent but also with the holiest passion; never, never had he sought her merely for wanton amusement. Her mother's last wish would be fulfilled. She need only trust him with her whole soul, and leave the "forge fire of life" to strengthen and purify her.

Now she remembered where the dying woman had heard the phrase.

Her Aunt Christine had used it recently in her mother's presence. Young Kunz Schürstab had fallen into evil ways in Lyons. Every one, even his own father, had given him up for lost; but after several years he returned home and proved himself capable of admirable work, both in his father's business and in the Council. In reply to Frau Ortlieb's enquiry where this transformation in the young man had occurred, her aunt answered: "In the forge fire of life." Eva told herself that she had intentionally kept aloof from its flames, and in the convent, perhaps, they would never have reached her. Yesterday they had seized upon her for the first time, and henceforward she would not evade them, that she might obey her mother and

become worthy of the man praying silently yonder. He owed to his heroic courage and good sword a renowned name; but what had she ever done save selfishly to provide for her own welfare in this world and the next? She had not even been strong enough to hold the head of the mother, to whom she owed everything and who had loved her so tenderly, when the convulsions attacked her.

Even after she closed her eyes in death—she had noticed it—she had been kept from every duty in the household and for the beloved dead, because it was deemed unsuitable for her, and Els and every one avoided putting the serious demands of life between the "little saint" and her aspirations towards the bliss of heaven. Yet Eva knew that she could accomplish whatever she willed to do, and instead of using the strength which she felt stirring with secret power in her fragile body, she had preferred to let it remain idle, in order to dwell in another world from that in which she had been permitted to prove her might. The fire of the forge, by whose means pieces of worthless iron were transformed into swords and ploughshares, should use its influence upon her also. Let it burn and torture her, if it only made her a genuine, noble woman, a woman like her Aunt Christine, from whom her mother had heard the phrase of "the forge fire of life," who aided and pointed out the right path to hundreds, and probably, at her age, had needed neither an Els nor an Abbess

Kunigunde to keep her, body and soul, in the right way. She loved both; but some impulse within rebelled vehemently against being treated like a child, and—now that her mother was dead—subjecting her own will to that of any other person than the man to whom she would have gladly looked up as a master.

Whilst Heinz knelt in front of the chapel without noticing Sister Perpetua, who was praying before the altar within, these thoughts darted through Eva's brain like a flash of lightning. Now he rose and went to his horse, but ere he mounted it the dog, barking furiously, again broke from the thicket close at her side.

Heinz must have seen her white mourning robes, for her own name reached her ears in a sudden cry, and soon after—she herself could not have told how—Heinz was standing beside the basket amidst the flowers, with her hand clasped in his, gazing into her eyes so earnestly and sadly that he seemed a different person from the reckless dancer in the Town Hall, though the look was equally warm and tender. Whilst doing so, he spoke of the deep wound inflicted upon her by her mother's death. Fate had dealt him a severe blow also, but grief taught him to turn whither she, too, had directed him.

Just at that moment the blast of the horn summoning the Emperor's train to his side echoed through the forest.

"The Emperor!" cried Heinz; then bending towards the flowers he seized a few forget me-nots, and, whilst gazing tenderly at them and Eva, murmured in a low tone, as if grief choked his utterance: "I know you will give them to me, for they wear the colour of the Queen of Heaven, which is also yours, and will be mine till my heart and eyes fail me."

Eva granted his request with a whispered "Keep them"; but he pressed his hand to his brow and, as if torn by contending emotions, hastily added: "Yes, it is that of the Holy Virgin. They say that Heaven has summoned me by a miracle to serve only her and the highest, and it often seems to me that they are right. But what will be the result of the conflicting powers which since that flash of lightning have drawn one usually so prompt in decision as I, now here, now there? Your blue, Eva, the hue of these flowers, will remain mine whether I wear it in honour of the Blessed Virgin, or—if the world does not release me—in yours. She or you! You, too, Eva, I know, stand hesitating at the crossing of two paths—which is the right one? We will pray Heaven to show it to you and to me."

As he spoke he swung himself swiftly into the saddle and, obeying the summons, dashed after his imperial master.

Eva gazed silently at the spot where he had vanished behind a group of pine trees; but Ortel,

who had gathered a few early strawberries for her, soon roused her from her waking dream by exclaiming, as he clapped his big hands: "I'll be hanged, Jungfrau Eva, if the knight who spoke to you isn't the Swiss to whom the great miracle happened yesterday!"

"The miracle?" she asked eagerly, for Els had intentionally concealed what she heard, and this evidently had something to do with the "wonderful summons" of which Heinz had spoken without being understood.

"Yes, a great, genuine miracle," Ortel went on eagerly. "The lightning—I heard it from the butcher boy who brings the meat, he learned it from his master's wife herself, and now every child in the city knows it—the lightning struck the knight's casque during the thundershower yesterday; it ran along his armour, flashing brightly; the horse sank dead under him without moving a limb, but he himself escaped unhurt, and the mark of a cross can be seen in the place where the lightning struck his helmet."

"And you think this happened to the very knight who took the flowers yonder?" asked Eva anxiously.

"As certainly as I hope to have the sacrament before I die, Jungfrau Eva," the youth protested. "I saw him riding with that lank Biberli, Kätterle's lover, who serves him, and such noblemen are not found by the dozen. Besides, he is one of those

nearest to the Emperor Rudolph's person. If it isn't he, I'll submit to torment——"

"Fie upon your miserable oaths!" Eva interrupted reprovingly. "Do you know also that the tall, stately gentleman with the long grey hair——"

"That was the Emperor Rudolph!" cried Ortel, sure he was right. "Whoever has once seen him does not forget him. Everything on earth belongs to him; but when the knight took our flowers so freely just now as if they were his own, I thought—— But there—there—there! See for yourself, Jungfrau! A heavy, unclipped yellow zecchin!"

As he spoke he took the coin in his hand, crossed himself, and added thoughtfully: "The little silver coin, or whatever he flung in here—perhaps to pay for the flowers, which are not worth five shillings—has been changed into pure gold by the saint who wrought the miracle for him. My soul! If many in Nuremberg paid so high for forage, the rich Eysvogel would leave the Council and go in search of wild flowers!"

Eva begged the man to leave the zecchin, promising to give him another at home and half a pound in coppers as earnest money. "This is what I call a lucky morning!" cried Ortel. But directly after he changed his tone, remembering Eva's white mourning robe and the object of their expedition, and his fresh voice sounded very sympathetic as he added: "If one could only call

your lady mother back to life! Ah, me! I'd spend all my savings to buy for the saints as many candles as my mother has in her little shop, if that would change things."

Whilst speaking he filled the basket with flowers, and the nun helped him. Eva walked before them with bowed head.

Could she hope to wed the man for whom Heaven had performed such a miracle? Was it no sin to hope and plead that he would wear their common colour, not in honour of the Queen of Heaven, but of the lowly Eva, in whom nothing was strong save the desire for good? Was not Heinz forcing her to enter into rivalry with one the most distant comparison with whom meant defeat? Yet, no! Her gracious Friend above knew her and her heart. She knew with what tender love and reverence she had looked up to her from childhood, and she now confided the love in her heart to her who had shown herself gracious a thousand times when she raised her soul to her in prayer.

Eva was breathing heavily when she emerged from the forest and stopped to wait until Sister Perpetua had finished her prayer in the chapel and overtook her. Her heart was heavy, and when, in the meadow beyond the woods, the heat of the sun, which was already approaching the zenith, made itself felt, it seemed as if she had left the untroubled happiness of childhood behind her in the

green thicket. Yet she would not have missed this forest walk at any price. She knew now that she had no rival save the one whom Heinz ought to love no less than she. Whether they both decided in favour of the world or the cloister, they would remain united in love for her and her divine Son.

CHAPTER III.

Outside the courtyard of the Ortlieb mansion Eva saw Biberli going towards the Frauenthor. He had been with Els a long time, giving a report as frankly as ever. The day before he said to Kätterle: "Calm yourself, my little lamb. Now that the daughters need you and me to carry secret messages, the father will leave us in peace too. A member of the Council would be like the receiver of stolen goods if he allowed a man whom he deemed worthy of the stocks to render him many services."

And Herr Ernst Ortlieb really did let him alone, because he was forced to recognise that Biberli and Kätterle were indispensable in carrying on his daughter's intercourse with Wolff.

Els had forgiven the clever fellow the more willingly the more consoling became the tidings he brought her from her betrothed bridegroom. Besides, she regarded it as specially fortunate that she learned through him many things concerning Heinz Schorlin, which for her sister's sake she was glad to know.

True, it would have been useless trouble to try to extort from the true and steadfast Biberli even a single word which, for his master's sake, it would have been wiser to withhold, yet he discussed matters patiently, and told her everything that he could communicate conscientiously. So, when Eva returned, she was accurately informed of all that had befallen and troubled the knight the day before.

She listened sympathisingly to the servant's lamentation over the marvellous change which had taken place in Heinz since his horse was killed under him. But she shook her head incredulously at Biberli's statement that his master seriously intended to seek peace in the cloister, like his two older sisters; yet at the man's animated description of how Father Benedictus had profited by Sir Heinz's mood to estrange him from the world, the doubt vanished.

Biberli's assurance that he had often seen other young knights rush into the world with specially joyous recklessness, who had suddenly halted as if in terror and known no other expedient than to change the coat of mail for the monk's cowl, reminded her of similar incidents among her own acquaintances. The man was right in his assertion that most of them had been directed to the monastery by monks of the Order of St. Francis, since the name of the Saint of Assisi and the miracles he performed had become known in this country

also. Whoever believed it impossible to see the gay Sir Heinz in a monk's cowl, added the experienced fellow, might find himself mistaken.

He had intentionally kept silence concerning Sir Seitz Siebenburg's challenge and his master's other dealings with the "Mustache." On the other hand, he had eagerly striven to inform Els of the minutest details of the reception he met with from her betrothed lover. With what zealous warmth he related that Wolff, like the upright man he was, had rejected even the faintest shadow of doubt of her steadfastness and truth, which were his own principal virtues also.

Even before Sir Heinz Schorlin's visit young Herr Eysvogel had known what to think of the calumnies which, it is true, were repeated to him. His calm, unclouded courage and clear mind were probably best shown by the numerous sheets of paper he had covered with estimates, all relating to the condition of the Eysvogel business. He had confided these documents also to him to be delivered to his father, and after discharging this duty he had come to her. According to his custom, he had reserved the best thing for the last, but it was now time to give it to her.

As he spoke he drew from the breast pocket of his long coat a wrought-iron rose. Els knew it well; it had adorned the clasp of her lover's belt, and the unusual delicacy of the workmanship had often aroused her admiration. What the gift was

to announce she read on the paper accompanying it, which contained the following simple lines:

> "The iron rude, when shaped by fire and blows,
> Delights our eyes as a most beauteous rose.
> So may the lies which strove to work us ill
> But serve our hearts with greater love to fill."

Biberli withdrew as soon as he had delivered the gift; his master was awaiting him on his return from his early ride with the Emperor; but Els, with glowing cheeks, read and reread the verse which brought such cheering consolation from her lover. It seemed like a miracle that they recalled the words of her dying mother concerning the forge fire which, in her last moments, she had mentioned in connection with Eva's future. Here it had formed from rude iron the fairest of flowers. Nothing sweeter or lovelier, the sister thought, could be made from her darling. But would the fire also possess the power to lead Eva, as it were, from heaven to earth, and transform her into an energetic woman, symmetrical in thought and deed? And what was the necessity? She was there to guide her and remove every stone from her path.

Ah, if she should renounce the cloister and find a husband like her Wolff! Again and again she read his greeting and pressed the beloved sheet to her lips. She would fain have hastened to her mother's corpse to show it to her. But just at that moment Eva returned. She must rejoice with her over this beautiful confirmation of her hope,

and as, with flushed cheeks and brow moist with perspiration, she stood before her, Els tenderly embraced her and, overflowing with gratitude, showed her her lover's gift and verse, and invited her to share the great happiness which so brightly illumined the darkness of her grief. Eva, who was so weary that she could scarcely stand thought, like her sister, as Els read Wolff's lines aloud, of her mother's last words. But the forge fire of life must not transform her into a rose; she would become harder, firmer, and she knew why and for whose sake. Only yesterday, had she been so exhausted, nothing would have kept her, after a few brief words to prevent Els's disappointment, from lying down, arranging her pillows comfortably, and refreshing herself with some cooling drink; but now she not only succeeded in appearing attentive, but in sympathising with all her heart in her sister's happiness. How delightful it was, too, to be able to give something to the person from whom hitherto she had only received.

She succeeded so fully in concealing the struggle against the claims of her wearied body that Els, after joyously perceiving how faithfully her sister sympathised with her own delight, continued to relate what she had just heard. Eva forced herself to listen and behave as if her account of Heinz Schorlin's wonderful escape and desire to enter a monastery was news to her.

Not until Els had narrated the last detail did

she admit that she needed rest; and when the former, startled by her own want of perception, urged her to lie down, she would not do so until she had put the flowers she had brought home into water. At last she stretched herself on the couch beside her sister, who had so long needed sleep and rest, and a few minutes after the deep dreamless slumber of youth chained both, until Kätterle, at the end of an hour, woke them.

Both used the favourable moments which follow the awakening from a sound sleep to cherish the best thoughts and most healthful resolutions. When Eva left her chamber she had clearly perceived what the last hours had taken and bestowed, and found a positive answer to the important question which she must now confront.

Els, like her lover, would cling fast to her love, and strive with tireless patience to conquer whatever obstacles it might encounter, especially from the Eysvogel family.

Before leaving home Eva adorned the beloved dead with the flowers, leaves, and vines which the gardener had brought and she herself had gathered, and at the church she put the last touches to this work so dear to her heart. She gave the preference to the flowers which had been her mother's favourites, but the others were also used. With a light hand and a delicate appreciation of harmony and beauty she interwove the children of the forest with those of the garden. She could not

be satisfied till every one was in the right place.

Countess Cordula had insisted upon attending the consecration, but she had not known who cared for its adornment. Yet when she stood in the church by the side of the open coffin she gazed long at the gentle face of the quiet sufferer, charming even in death, who on her bright couch seemed dreaming in a light slumber. At last she whispered to Els: "How wonderfully beautiful! Did you arrange it?"

The latter shook her head, but Cordula added, as if soliloquising: "It seems as though the hands of the Madonna herself had adorned a sleeping saint with garden flowers, and child-angels had scattered over her the blossoms of the forest."

Then Els, who hitherto had refused to talk in this place and this solemn hour, broke her silence and briefly told Cordula who had artistically and lovingly adorned her mother.

"Eva?" repeated the countess, as if surprised, gazing at her friend's younger sister who, as the music of the organ and the alternate chanting had just begun, had already risen from her knees. Cordula felt spellbound, for the young girl looked as fresh as a May rose and so touchingly beautiful in the deep, earnest devotion which filled her whole being, and the white purity of her mourning robes, that the countess did not understand how she could ever have disliked her. Eva, with her up-

lifted eyes, seemed to be gazing directly into the open heavens.

Cordula paid little attention to the sacred service, but watched the Es, as she liked to call the sisters, all the more closely. The elder, though so overwhelmed with grief that she could not help sobbing aloud, did not cease to think of her dear ones, and from time to time gazed with tender sympathy at her father or with quiet sorrow at her sister. Eva, on the contrary, was completely absorbed by her own anguish and the memory of her to whom it was due. The others appeared to have no existence for her. Whilst the large tears rolled slowly down her cheeks, she sometimes gazed tenderly at the face of the beloved dead; sometimes, with fervent entreaty, at the image of the Virgin. The pleading expression of the large blue eyes seemed to the countess to express such childlike need of help that the impetuous girl would fain have clasped her to her heart and exclaimed: "Wait, you lovely, obstinate little orphan; Cordula, whom you dislike, is here, and though you don't wish to receive any kindness from her, you must submit. What do I care for all the worshippers of a very poor idol who call themselves my 'adorers'? I need only detain wandering pilgrims, or invite minnesingers to the castle, to shorten the hours. And he for whom yonder child-angel's heart yearns—would he not be a fool to prefer a Will-o'-the-wisp like me? Besides, it is easy for the

peasant to give his neighbour the cloud which hangs over his field. True, before the dance—— But the past is past. Boemund Altrosen is the only person who is always the same. One can rely upon him, but I really need neither. If I could only do without the open air, the forest, horses, and hunting, I should suit convent walls far better than this Eva, whom Heaven itself seems to have created to be the delight of every man's heart. We will see what she herself decides."

Then she recognised Sir Boemund Altrosen in the congregation and pursued her train of thought. "He is a noble man, and whoever thus makes himself miserable about me I ought to try to cure. Perhaps I will yet do so."

Similar reflections occupied her mind until she saw Heinz Schorlin kneeling, half concealed by a pillar, behind Boemund Altrosen. He had learned from Biberli at what hour the consecration would take place, and his honest heart bade him attend the service for the dead woman who had so much to forgive him.

The Ortlieb sisters did not see him, but Cordula unconsciously shook her head as she gazed. Was this grave man, so absorbed in devotion that he did not vouchsafe those who surrounded him even a single glance, the Heinz whose delightful gaiety had captivated her heart? The linden, with foliage withered by the autumn blasts, was more like

the same tree in the spring when the birds were singing in its boughs, than yonder absorbed supplicant resembled the bold Heinz of a few days ago. The old mocker, Chamberlain Wiesenthau, was right when he told her and her father that morning that the gay Swiss had been transformed by the miracle which had befallen him, like the Saul of holy writ, in the twinkling of an eye, into a Paul. The calendar-makers were already preparing to assign a day to St. Schorlin.

But she ought not to have joined in the boisterous laugh with which her father rewarded the old slanderer's news. No! The knight's experience must have made a deeper impression than the others suspected.

Perhaps little Eva's love would result in her seeking with the sisters of St. Clare, and Heinz with the Franciscans, peace and a loftier passion. She was certainly to be pitied if love had taken as firm a hold upon her heart as Cordula thought she had perceived.

Again her kind heart throbbed with tender sympathy, and when the sisters left the sedan-chairs which had brought them back to the house, and Cordula met Eva in the corridor, she held out her hand with frank cordiality, saying, "Clasp it trustingly, girl. True, you do not value it much, but it is offered to no one to whom Cordula does not mean kindly."

Eva, taken by surprise, obeyed her request.

How frank and kindly her grey eyes were! Cordula herself must be so, too, and, obeying a hasty impulse, she nodded with friendly warmth; then, as if ashamed of her change of mood, hurried past her up the stairs.

The following day had been appointed for the mass for the dead in St. Sebald's Church.

Els had told Eva that the countess had seen Heinz Schorlin at the consecration. The news pleased her, and she expressed her joy so animatedly and spoke so confidently of the knight's love that Els felt anxious. But she did not have courage to disturb her peace of mind, and her father's two sisters, the abbess, and Herr Pfinzing's wife, also said nothing to Eva concerning the future as they helped Els to arrange the dead woman's clothing, which was to be given to the poor, decide to what persons or charitable institutions it should be sent, and listened to her account of the facts that formed the foundation of the slanders against her, which were being more loudly and universally discussed throughout the city.

Eva felt painfully how incapable of rendering assistance the others considered her, and her pride forbade her to urge it upon them. Even her Aunt Kunigunde scarcely asked her a question. It seemed to the abbess that the right hour for a decisive enquiry had not yet come, and wise Aunt Christine never talked with her younger niece

upon religious subjects unless she herself requested her to do so.

The mass for the dead was to be celebrated at an unusually early hour, for another, which would be attended by the whole city and all the distinguished persons, knights, and nobles who had come to the Reichstag, was to begin four hours before noon. This was for Prince Hartmann, who had been snatched away so prematurely.

The Ortliebs, with all their kindred and servants, the members of the Council with their wives and daughters, and many burghers and burgher women, assembled soon after sunrise in St. Sebald's Church.

Those present were almost lost in the spacious, lofty interior with its three naves. At first there was little appearance of devotion, for the early arrivals had many things to ask and whisper to one another. The city architect lowered his loud voice very little as he discussed with a brother in the craft from Cologne in what way the house of God, which originally had been built in the Byzantine style, could be at least partly adapted to the French pointed arch which was used with such remarkable success in Germany, at Cologne and Marburg. They discussed the eastern choir, which needed complete rebuilding, the missing steeples, and the effect of the pointed arch which harmonised so admirably with the German cast of character, and did not cease until the music began. Now

the great number of those present showed how much love the dead woman had sowed and reaped.

The sisters, when they first looked around them, saw with grateful joy the father of the young man who had fallen in the duel with Wolff, old Herr Berthold Vorchtel, his wife, and Ursula. On the other hand, the pew adorned with the Eysvogel coat of arms was still empty. This wounded Els deeply; but she uttered a sigh of relief when—the *introitus* had just begun—at least one member of the haughty family to which she felt allied through Wolff appeared, Isabella Siebenburg, her lover's sister. It was kind in her to come notwithstanding the absence of the others, and even her own husband. Els would return it to her and her twins.

The music, whose heart-stirring notes accompanied the solemn service, deeply moved the souls of both sisters; but when, after the *Gloria in excelsis Deo*, the *Cum Sancto Spiritu* pealed forth, Eva, who, absorbed in devotion, had long since ceased to gaze around her, felt her sister's hand touch her arm and, following the direction of her glance, saw at some distance the man for whom her heart yearned, and the grave, devout knight yonder seemed far nearer to her than the gay companion who, in the mazes of the dance, had gazed so boldly into the faces of the men, so tenderly into those of the fair women. How fast her heart throbbed! how ardently she longed for the moment when he would raise his head and look across at her! But when he moved,

it was only to follow the sacred service and with it Christ's sacrifice upon the cross.

Then Eva reproached herself for depriving her dead mother, to the repose of whose soul this hour was dedicated, of her just due, and she strove with all her power to regain the spirit of devotion which she had lost. But her lover sat opposite and, though she lowered her eyes, her earnest endeavour to concentrate her thoughts was futile.

Her struggle was interrupted by the commencement of the *Credo*, and during this confession, which brings before the Christian in a fixed form what it is incumbent upon him to believe, the thought entered her mind of beseeching her whose faithful love had always guided her safely and for her good—the Queen of Heaven, to whom Heinz was as loyally devoted as she herself—that she might give her a sign whether she might continue to believe in his love and keep faith with him, or whether she should return to the path which led to a different form of happiness.

During the singing of the *Credo* the heavenly Helper, for whose aid she hoped, made known to her that if, before the end of the *Sanctus*, which immediately followed the *Credo*, Heinz looked over at her and returned her glance, she might deem it certain that the Holy Virgin would permit her to hope for his love. If he omitted to do so, then she would consider it decided that he renounced his earthly for his heavenly love, and try herself to

give up the earthly one, in which, however, she believed she had recognised something divine.

The *Credo* closed and died away, the resonant harmonies of the *Sanctus* filled the wide space, and the knight, with the same devout attention, followed the sacred service in which, in the imagination of believers, the bread and wine is transformed into the body and blood of Christ, and a significant, painless ceremony represents the Saviour's bloody death upon the cross.

Eva told herself that she ought to have followed with the same intentness as Heinz the mass celebrated for the soul of her own mother, but she could no longer succeed in doing so. Besides, she was denied the privilege of looking freely and often at him upon whose movements depended the fate of her life. Many glances were undoubtedly directed at her, the daughter of the dead woman in whose memory so many citizens had gathered; many, perhaps, had come solely to see the beautiful Es. Therefore propriety and modesty forbade her to watch Heinz. She only ventured to cast a stolen glance at him.

Every note of the *Sanctus* was familiar to her, and when it drew near the end Heinz retained the same position. The fairest hope of her life must be laid with the flowers in her mother's coffin.

Now the last bars of the *Sanctus* were commencing. He had scarcely had time to change his attitude since her last secret glance at him, yet she

could not resist the temptation, though it was useless, of looking at him once more. She felt like the prisoner who sees the judge rise and does not know whether he intends to acquit or condemn him. The city lute-player who led the choir was just raising his hands again to let them fall finally at the close of the *Sanctus*, and as she turned her eyes from him in the direction whence only too soon she was to be deprived of the fairest of rights, a burning blush suddenly crimsoned her cheeks. Heinz Schorlin's eyes had met hers with a full, clear gaze.

Eva pressed her clasped hands, as if beseeching aid, upon her bosom, which rose and fell beneath them with passionate emotion; and—— No, she could not be mistaken; he had understood her, for his look expressed a wealth of sympathy, the ardent, sorrowful sympathy which only love knows. Then the eyes of both fell. When their glances met again, the hosanna of the choir rang out to both like a shout of welcome with which liberated Nature exultingly greets the awakening spring; and to the deeply agitated knight, who had resolved to fly from the world and its vain pleasures, the hosanna which poured its waves of sound towards him, whilst the eyes of the woman he loved met his for the second time, seemed to revive the waning joy of existence. The shout which had greeted the Saviour on his entry into Jerusalem reached the "called" man like a command from love to open wide the gate of the heart, and whether he willed

it or not, love, amidst the solemn melody of the hosanna, made a new and joyous entrance into his grateful soul. But during the *Benedictus* he was already making the first attempt to resist this emotion; and whilst Eva, first offering thanks for the cheering decision, and then earnestly striving to enter with her whole soul into the sacred service, modestly denied herself the pleasure of looking across at her lover, Heinz was endeavouring to crush the hopes which had again mastered the soul resolved on renunciation.

Yet he found the conflict harder than he expected and as, at the close of the mass, the *Dona nobis pacem* (grant us peace) began, he joined beseechingly in the prayer.

It was not granted, for even during the high mass for the soul of his dearest friend, which also detained the Ortliebs in church, he sought Eva's glance only too often, but always in vain. Once only, when the *Dona nobis pacem* pealed forth again, this time for the prince, his eyes met those of the woman he loved.

The young Duchess Agnes noticed whither he looked so often, but when Countess Cordula knelt beside the Ortliebs, cordially returned every glance of the knight's, and once even nodded slightly to him, the young Bohemian believed the report that Heinz Schorlin and the countess were the same as betrothed, and it vexed her—nay, spoiled the whole of the day which had just begun.

When Heinz left the church Eva's image filled his heart and mind. He went directly from the sanctuary to his lodgings; but there neither Frau Barbara, his pretty young hostess, nor Biberli would believe their eyes or ears, when the former heard in the entry, the latter in the adjoining room, the lash of a scourge upon naked limbs, and loud groans. Both sounds were familiar to Bärbel through her father, and to Biberli from the time of penance after his stay in Paris, and his own person.

Heinz Schorlin, certainly for the first time in his life, had scourged himself.

It was done by the advice of Father Benedictus but, although he followed the counsel so earnestly that for a long time large bloody stripes covered his back and shoulders, this remedy for sinful thoughts produced an effect exactly opposite to the one expected; for, whenever the places where the scourge had struck him so severely smarted under his armour, they reminded him of her for whose sake he had raised his hand against himself, and the blissful glance from her eyes.

CHAPTER IV.

DURING the days which succeeded the mass for the dead the Ortlieb mansion was very silent.

The Burgrave von Zollern, who still gladly concealed in his castle the brave companion in arms to whom he had entrusted the imperial standard on the Marchfield, when his own strong arm needed rest, had permitted Herr Ernst, as the young man's future father-in-law, to visit him. Both were now in constant communication, as Els hoped, for the advantage of the Eysvogel business.

Biberli did not cease acting as messenger between her and her future bridegroom; nay, he could now devote the lion's share of his days to it; his master, for the first time since he had entered his service, had left him.

The Emperor had been informed of the great shock experienced by the young knight, but it was unnecessary; an eye far less keen would not have failed to note the change in Heinz Schorlin.

The noble man who, even as a sovereign, retained the warmth of heart which had characterised him in his youth as a count, sincerely loved

his blithe, loyal, brave young countryman, whose father he had valued, whose mother he highly esteemed, and who had been the dearest friend of the son whom death had so early snatched from him.

He knew him thoroughly, and had watched his development with increasing warmth of sympathy, the more so as many a trait of character which he recognised in Heinz reminded him of his own nature and aspirations at his age.

At the court of Frederick II he too had not always walked in the paths of virtue but, like Heinz, he had never let this merge into licentiousness, and had maintained the chivalrous dignity of his station even more strictly than the former.

Neither had he at any time deviated from the sincere piety which he had brought from his home to the imperial court, and this was far more difficult in the train of the bold and intellectual Hohenstaufen, who was prone to blaspheme even the holiest things, than for Heinz. Finally he, too, had lapsed into the mood which threatened to lead the light-hearted Schorlin into a monastery.

The mighty impulse which at that time, owing to the example and teachings of St. Francis in Italy, had taken possession of so many minds, also left its impress on his young soul, already agitated by sympathy with many an extravagant idea, many an opinion condemned by the Church. But ere he had taken even the first decisive step he was sum-

moned home. His father had resolved to obtain on the sacred soil of Palestine the mercy of Heaven which was denied to the excommunicated Emperor, and desired his oldest son, Rudolph, to represent him at home.

Before his departure he confided to his noble son his aspirations for the grandeur and enlargement of his house, and the youth of twenty-one did not venture to tell the dignified, far-sighted man, whom his subjects rightly surnamed "the Wise," his ardent desire to live henceforth solely for the salvation of his endangered soul.

The sense of duty inherited from father and mother, which both had imprinted deeply upon his soul, and also the ambition that had been sedulously fostered at the court of the Emperor Frederick, had given him courage to repress forever the wish with which he had left the Hohenstaufen court. The sacrifice was hard, but he made it willingly as soon as it became apparent to his reflective mind that not only his earthly but his heavenly Father had appointed the task of devoting the full wealth of his talents and the power of his will to the elevation of the house of Hapsburg.

The very next year he stood in the place of his father who fell at Ascalon, deeply lamented.

The arduous labour imposed by the management of his own great possessions, and the ceaseless endeavour to enlarge them, in accordance with

the dead man's wishes, gave him no time to cherish the longing for the peace of the cloister.

After his election as King of Germany, which had long been neglected under the government of sham emperors, increased the burden of his duties the more seriously he took them, and the more difficult the Bohemian king Ottocar, especially, rendered it for him to maintain the crown he had won, the more eagerly he strove, particularly after the victory of Marchfield had secured his sovereignty, to increase the power of his house.

A binding duty, a difficult task, must also withhold Heinz Schorlin from the wish for whose fulfilment his fiery young soul now fervently longed, and which he knew was receiving powerful sustenance from a worthy and eloquent Minorite.

Rudolph's own brother had died in peace as canon of Basel and Strasbourg; his sister was happy in her convent as a modest Dominican; but the young knight over whose welfare he had promised his mother to watch, and whom he loved, was not fitted for the monastic life.

However earnest might be his intention—after the miracle which seemed to have been wrought specially for him—of renouncing the world, sooner or later the time must come when Heinz would long to return to it and the profession of arms, for which he was born and reared. But if he could not be deterred from entering the modest

order of the mendicant monks, who proudly called poverty their beloved bride, and should become the head of a bishopric while young, he would inevitably be one of those fighting prelates who seemed to the Emperor—who disliked half-way measures—neither knight nor priest, and with whom he had had many a quarrel.

Opposition would merely have sharpened the young knight's desire; therefore his imperial patron had treated him as if he were ignorant of what was passing in his mind. Without circumlocution, he commanded him, at the head of several bodies of Frank, Swabian, and Swiss troopers, whom he placed at his orders, to attack the brothers Siebenburg and their allies, and destroy their castle. If possible, he was to bring them alive before the imperial judgment seat, and recover for the Eysvogels the merchandise of which they had been robbed.

When Heinz, after the Emperor Rudolph had mentioned the latter name, earnestly entreated him to prevent Wolff's persecution, the sovereign promised to fulfil the wish as soon as the proper time came. He himself desired to be gracious to the brave champion of Marchfield, who under great irritation had drawn his sword. But when Heinz also asked the Emperor to send his friend Count Gleichen with him, the request was refused. He must have the entire responsibility of the expedition which he commanded; for nothing ex-

cept an important duty that no one would help him bear, gave promise of making him forget everything that usually engrossed his attention, and thus his new object of longing. Besides, if he returned victorious his fame and reward would be undivided.

The Hapsburg wished to try upon his young favourite the means which had availed to keep his own footsteps in the path which he desired to see Heinz follow: constant occupation associated with heavy responsibility, the success which brings with it the hope of future achievement and thereby rouses ambition.

The wisdom and kindness of heart of the Emperor Rudolph, whom the grey-haired ruler's friends called "Wisdom," had certainly chosen the right course for Heinz. But he who had always regarded every opportunity of drawing his sword for his master as a rare piece of good fortune, shrank in dismay from this, the most important and honourable charge that had ever been bestowed upon him. It drew him away from the new path in which he did not yet feel at home, because the love he could not abjure constantly thrust him into the world, into the midst of the life and tumult from which Heaven itself commanded him to turn aside.

The Minorite had scarcely been right in the assertion that only the first rounds of the ladder which leads to heavenly bliss were hard to climb.

How quickly he had set his foot on the first step; but each upward stride was followed by one that dragged him down—nay, it had seemed advisable wholly to renounce the effort to ascend them, when the monk expected him to sever the bond which united him to the Emperor, and to tell the sovereign that he had entered the service of a greater Master, who commanded him to fight with other weapons than the sword and lance.

Heinz had regarded this demand as a summons to turn traitor. It did not seem to be the call of the devout, experienced director of souls to the disciples, but the Guelph to the Ghibelline, for Ghibelline he meant to remain. Gratitude was a Christian virtue, too, and to refuse his service to the Emperor, who had been a father to him, to whom he had sworn fealty, and who had loaded him with benefits, could not be pleasing in the sight of any God. He could never become a Guelph, he told his venerable friend. The Emperor Rudolph was his beloved master, from whom he had received nothing but kindness. He might as well be required to refuse obedience to his own father.

"What Guelph? What Ghibelline?" cried the Minorite in a tone of grave rebuke. "The question is submission to the Most High, or to the world and its claims. And why should not Heaven require, as you term it, that you should obey the Lord more willingly than your earthly father—

you, whom the mercy of God summoned amidst thunder and lightning in the presence of thousands? When Francis, our beloved model, the son of Pier Bernardone, was threatened with his father's curse if he did not turn back from the path which led to the highest goal, Francis restored all that he had received from him, except his last garment, and with the exclamation, 'Our Father who art in heaven, not Pier Bernardone," he made the choice between his earthly and his heavenly Father. From the former he would have received in abundance everything that the heart of a child of the world desires—wealth, paternal love, and the blessing which is said to build houses on earth. But Francis preferred poverty and contempt, nay, even his father's curse and the reproach of ingratitude, receiving in exchange possessions of a nobler nature and more lasting character. You have heard their names. To obtain them, means to share the bliss of heaven. And you "—he continued loudly, adopting for the first time a tone of authoritative severity—"if you really yearned for the greatest possessions, go to the fortress this very hour, and with the cry in your heart, though not on your lips, 'Our Father who art in heaven, not my gracious master and benefactor Rudolph,' inform the Emperor what higher Lord you have vowed to serve.'"

This kindled a fierce conflict in Heinz Schorlin's

soul, which perhaps might have ended in favour of a new career and St. Francis, had not Biberli, ere he reached a conclusion, rushed into the room shouting: "Seitz Siebenburg, the Mustache, has joined his brothers, and the Knight of Absbach, with several others—von Hirsdorf, von Streitberg, and whatever their names may be—have made common cause with them! It is said that they also expected reinforcements from the Main, in order that the right to the road——"

"Gossip, or positive news?" interrupted Heinz, drawing himself up to his full height with the cool composure which he attained most easily when any serious danger threatened him.

"As positive," replied his follower eagerly, "as that Siebenburg is the greatest rascal in Germany. You will be robbed of your joust with him, for he'll mount the block instead of the steed, just as you predicted. The ladies will drive him from the lists with pins and rods, to say nothing of the scourging by which knight and squire will silence him. Oh, my lord, if you only knew!"

"Well?" asked the knight anxiously.

Then Biberli, paying no further heed to his master's orders never to mention the Ortlieb sisters again in his presence, burst forth indignantly: "It might move a stone to pity to know the wrong the monster has done Jungfrau Eva and her pure and virtuous sister, the loyal betrothed bride of a brave man—and the abominable names bestowed on the

young ladies, whom formerly young and old, hat in hand, called the beautiful Es."

Heinz stamped his foot on the floor and, half frantic, impetuously exclaimed, his blood boiling with honest indignation: "May the air he breathes destroy the slandering scoundrel! May I be flayed on the rack if——"

Here he was interrupted by a low exclamation of warning from the Minorite, who perceived in the knight's fierce oaths a lamentable relapse. Heinz himself felt ashamed of the ungodly imprecations; yet he could by no means succeed in regaining his former composure as, drawing a long breath, he continued: "And those city hypocrites, who call themselves Christians, and build costly cathedrals for the good of their souls, are not ashamed—yes, holy Father, it is true—basely to deny our Lord and Saviour, who is Love itself, and deemed even the Magdalen worthy of His mercy, and rub their hands in fiendish malignity when unpunished they can sully the white robe of innocence, and drag pious, lovely simplicity to the pillory."

"That is the very reason, my son," the monk interrupted soothingly, "that we disciples of the Saint of Assisi go forth to show the deluded what the Lord requires of them. Therefore leave behind you the dust of the world, which defiles both body and soul, join us, who did so before you, and help, as one of our order, to make those who are perishing in sin and dishonouring the name of Christ

better and purer, genuine Christians. In this hour of stress lay the sword out of your hand, and leave the steed——"

"I shall ride forth, rely upon it, holy Father," Heinz burst forth afresh. "With the sky-blue of the gracious Virgin, whom I love, on my shield and helmet, I will dash like the angel Michael amongst the Siebenburgs and their followers. And let me tell you, holy Father—you who were once a knight also—if the Mustache, weltering in his blood at my feet, prays for mercy, I'll teach him——"

"Son! son!" interrupted the monk again, this time raising his hands imploringly; but Heinz, paying no heed, exclaimed hoarsely:

"Where did you get this news?"

"From our Berne countryman at the fortress," replied the servant eagerly; "Brandenstein, Schweppermann, and Heidenab brought the tidings. The Emperor received them at the gate of the citadel, where he was keeping watch ere he mounted his steed. He heard him call to the messengers, 'So our Heinz Schorlin will have a hard nut to crack.'"

"Which he will crush after his own heart!" cried Heinz, with flashing eyes.

Then, forcing himself to be calm, he exclaimed in broken sentences, whilst Biberli was helping him put on his armour: "Your wish, reverend Father, is also mine. The world—the sooner I can rid myself of it the better; yet what you describe in the most alluring terms is the peace in your midst,

I—I—— Never, never will my heart be calm until——"

Here he paused suddenly, struck his breast swiftly and repeatedly with his fists, and continued eagerly: "Here, Father Benedictus, here are old and strong demands, which you, too, must once have known ere you offered the other cheek to the foe. I know not what to call them, but until they are satisfied I shall never be yours. They must be fulfilled; then, if in battle and bloodshed I can also forget the love which ever rises again when I think I have given it the deathblow, if Heaven still desires poor, heartsick Heinz Schorlin, it shall have him."

The Minorite received the promise with a silent bend of the head. He felt that he might seriously endanger the fulfilment of his ardent wish to gain this soul for heaven if he urged Heinz further now. Patiently awaiting a more fitting season, he therefore contented himself with questioning him carelessly about the foe and his castles.

The day was hot, and as Biberli laced the gambeson—the thick, quilted undergarment over which was worn the heavy leather coat covered with scales and rings—the monk exclaimed: "When the duty which you believe you owe to the world has been fulfilled, you will gratefully learn, as one of our order, how pleasant it is to walk with liberated soul in our light-brown cowl."

But he ought to have repressed the remark,

for Heinz cast a glance at him which expressed his astonishment at being so misunderstood, and answered with unyielding resolution: "If I long for anything in your order, reverend Father, it is not for easy tasks, but for the most difficult burden of all. Your summons to take our Redeemer's cross upon me pleases me better."

"And I, my son, believe that your words will be inscribed amongst those which are sure of reward," the monk answered; then with bowed head added: "At that moment you were nearer the kingdom of heaven than the aged companion of St. Francis."

But perceiving how impatiently Heinz shrugged his shoulders, and convinced that it would be advisable to leave him to himself for a time, the old man blessed him with paternal affection and went his way. When the fiery youth had performed the task which now claimed all his powers, he hoped to find him more inclined to allow himself to be led farther along the path which he had entered.

CHAPTER V.

THE Minorite had gone. Biberli had noticed with delight that his master had not sought as usual to detain him. The iron now seemed to him hot, and he thought it would be worth while to swing the hammer.

The danger in which Heinz stood of being drawn into the monastery made him deeply anxious, and he had already ventured several times to oppose his design. Life was teaching him to welcome a small evil when it barred the way to a greater one, and his master's marriage, even with a girl of far lower station than Eva Ortlieb, would have been sure of his favour, if only it would have deterred him from the purpose of leaving the world to which he belonged.

"True," the servitor began, "in such heat it is easier to walk in the thin cowl than in armour. The holy Father is right there. But when it is necessary to be nimble, the knight has his dancing dress also. Oh, my lord, what a sight it was when you were waltzing with the lovely Jungfrau Eva! 'Look at Heinz Schorlin, the brave hero of March-

field, and the girl with the angel face who is with him!' said those around me, as I was gazing down from the balcony. And just think—I can't help speaking of it again—that now respectable people dare to point their fingers at the sisters and join in the base calumny uttered by a scoundrel!"

Then Heinz fulfilled Biberli's secret longing to be questioned about the Es and the charges against them, and he forged the iron.

Not from thirst, he said, but to ascertain what fruit had grown from the hellish seeds sown by Siebenburg, and probably the still worse ones of the Eysvogel women, he went from tavern to tavern, and there he heard things which made him clench his fists, and, at the Red Ox, roused him to such violent protest that he went out of the tap-room faster than he entered it.

Thereupon, without departing far from the truth, he related what was said about the beautiful Es in Nuremberg.

It was everywhere positively asserted that a knight belonging to the Emperor's train had been caught at the Ortlieb mansion, either in a nocturnal interview or while climbing into the window. Both sisters were said to be guilty. But the sharpest arrows were aimed at Els, the betrothed bride of the son of a patrician family, whom many a girl would have been glad to wed. That she preferred the foreigner, whether a Bohemian, a Swabian, or

even a Swiss, made her error doubly shameful in the eyes of most persons.

Whenever Biberli had investigated the source of these evil tales, he had invariably found it to be Seitz Siebenburg, his retainers, the Eysvogel butler, or some man or maidservant in their employ.

The Vorchtels, who, as he knew from Kätterle, would have had the most reason to cherish resentment against the Ortliebs, had no share in these slanders.

The shrewd fellow had discovered the truth, for after Seitz Siebenburg had wandered about in the open air during the storm, he again tried to see his wife. But the effort was vain. Neither entreaties nor threats would induce her to open the door. Meanwhile it had grown late and, half frantic with rage, he went to the Duke of Pomerania's quarters in the Green Shield to try his luck in gaming. The dice were again moving rapidly, but no one grasped the box when he offered a stake. No more insulting rebuff could be imagined, and the repulse which he received from his peers, and especially the duke, showed him that he was to be excluded from this circle.

He was taught at the same time that if he answered the challenge of the Swiss he would not be permitted to enter the lists. Thus he confronted the impossibility of satisfying a demand of honour, and this terrible thought induced him to declare

war against everything which honour had hitherto enjoined, and with it upon its guardians.

If they treated him as a robber and a dishonoured man, he would behave like one; but those who had driven him so far should suffer for it.

During the rest of the night and on the following day, until the gate was closed, he wandered, goblet in hand, only half conscious of what he was doing, from tavern to tavern, to tell the guests what he knew about the beautiful Es; and at every repetition of the accusations, of whose justice he was again fully convinced, his hatred against the sisters, and those who were their natural defenders and therefore his foes, increased. Every time he repeated the old charges an addition increasing the slander was made and, as if aided by some mysterious ally, it soon happened that in various places his own inventions were repeated to him by the lips of others who had heard them from strangers. True, he was often contradicted, sometimes violently but, on the whole, people believed him more readily than would have happened in the case of any other person; for every one admitted that, as the brother-in-law of the older E, he had a right to express his indignation in words.

Meanwhile his twins often returned to his memory. The thought ought to have restrained him from such base conduct; but the idea that he was avenging the wrong inflicted upon their

father's honour, and thus upon theirs, urged him further and further.

Not until a long ride through the forest had sobered him did he see his conduct in the proper light.

Insult and disgrace would certainly await him in the city. His brothers would receive him kindly. They were of his own blood and could not help welcoming his sharp sword. Side by side with them he would fight and, if it must be, die.

A voice within warned him against making common cause with those who had robbed the family of which he had become a member, yet he again used the remembrance of his innocent darlings to palliate his purpose. For their sakes only he desired to go to his death, sword in hand, like a valiant knight in league with those who were risking their lives in defence of the ancient privilege of their class. They must not even suspect that their father had been shut out from the tournament, but grow up in the conviction that he had fallen as a heroic champion of the cause of the lesser knights to whom he belonged, and on whose neck the Emperor had set his foot.

The assurance which Biberli brought Heinz Schorlin that Seitz Siebenburg had joined those whom he was ordered to punish, placed the task assigned him by the Emperor in a new and attractive light; but the servant's report, so far as it concerned the Ortlieb sisters, pierced the inmost

depths of his soul. He alone was to blame for the disgrace which had fallen upon innocent maidens. By the destruction of the calumny he would at least atone for a portion of his sin. But this did not suffice. It was his duty to repair the wrong he had done the sisters. How? That he could not yet determine; for whilst wielding the executioner's sword in his master's service all these thoughts must be silenced; he could consider nothing save to fulfil the task confided to him by his imperial benefactor and commander in chief, according to his wishes, and show him that he had chosen wisely in trusting him to "crack the nut" which he himself had pronounced a hard one. The yearning and renunciation, the reproaches and doubts which disturbed his life, until recently so easy, had disgusted him with it. He would not spare it. Yet if he fell he would be deprived of the possibility of doing anything whatever for those who through his imprudence had lost their dearest possession—their good name. Whenever this picture rose before him it sometimes seemed as if Eva was gazing at him with her large, bright eyes as trustingly as during the pause in the dancing, and anon he fancied he saw her as she looked at her mother's consecration in her deep mourning before the altar. At that time her grief and pain had prevented her from noticing how his gaze rested on her; yet never had she appeared more desirable, never had he longed more ardently to

clasp her in his arms, console her, and assure her that his love should teach her to forget her grief, that she was destined to find new happiness in a union with him.

This had happened to him just as he commenced the struggle for a new life. Startled, he confessed it to his grey-haired guide, and used the means which the Minorite advised him to employ to attain forgetfulness and renunciation, but always in vain. Had he, like St. Francis, rushed among briers, his blood would not have turned into roses, but doubtless fresh memories of her whose happiness his guilt had so suddenly and cruelly destroyed.

For her sake he had already begun to doubt his vocation on the very threshold of his new career, and did not recover courage until Father Benedictus, who had communicated with the Abbess Kunigunde, informed him that Eva was wax in her hands, and within the next few days she would induce her niece to take the veil.

This news had exerted a deep influence upon the young knight's soul. If Eva entered the cloister before him, the only strong tie which united him to the world would be severed, and nothing save the thought of his mother would prevent his following his vocation. Yet vehement indignation seized him when he heard from Biberli that the slanderer's malice would force Eva to seek refuge with the Sisters.

No, a thousand times no! The woman whom he loved should need to seek refuge from nothing for which Heinz Schorlin's desire and resolve alike commanded him to make amends.

He must succeed in proving to the whole world that she and her sister were as pure as they lived in his imagination, either by offering in the lists the boldest defiance to every one who refused to acknowledge that both were the most chaste and decorous ladies in the whole world, and Eva, at the same time, the loveliest and fairest, or by the open interference of the Emperor or the Burggravine in behalf of the persecuted sisters, after he had confessed the whole truth to his exalted patrons.

But when Biberli pointed out the surest way of restoring the endangered reputation of the woman he loved, and begged him to imagine how much more beautiful she would look in the white bridal veil than in her mourning Riese,* he ordered him to keep silence.

The miracle wrought in his behalf forbade him to yearn for happiness and joy here below. It was intended rather to open his eyes and urge him to leave the path which led to eternal damnation. It pointed him to the kingdom of heaven and its bliss, which could be purchased only by severe sacrifice and the endurance of every grief which the

* Kerchief of fine linen, arranged like a veil.

Saviour had taken upon Himself. But he could at least pay one honour to the maiden to whom he was so strongly attracted, and whose happiness for life was menaced by his guilt. When he had assembled his whole force at Schwabach, he would go into battle with her colour on his helmet and shield. The Queen of Heaven would not be angry with him if he wore her light blue to atone to the pure and pious Eva, who was hers even more fully than he himself, for the wrong inflicted upon her by spiteful malice.

Heinz Schorlin's friends thought the change in his mood a natural consequence of the events which had befallen him; young Count Gleichen, his most intimate companion, even looked up to him since his "call" as a consecrated person.

His grey-haired cousin, Sir Arnold Maier, of Silenen, was a devout man whose own son led a happy life as a Benedictine monk at Engelberg. The sign by which Heaven had signified its will to Heinz had made a deep impression upon him, and though he would have preferred to see him continue in the career so auspiciously begun, he would have considered it impious to dissuade him from obeying the summons vouchsafed by the Most High. So he offered no opposition, and sent by the next courier a letter to Lady Wendula Schorlin, his young cousin's mother, in which, with Heinz's knowledge—nay, at his request—he related what her son had experienced, and entreated her not to

withhold him from the vocation of which God deemed him worthy.

Meanwhile, Biberli wrote to his master's mother in a different strain, and did not desist from expressing his opinion to Heinz, and assuring him that his place was on a battle charger, with his sword in its sheath or in his hand, rather than in a monastery with a rosary hanging from a hempen girdle.

This had vexed Heinz—nay, made him seriously angry with the faithful fellow; and when in full armour he prepared to mount his steed to receive the last directions of his imperial master, and Biberli asked him on which horse he should follow, he answered curtly that this time he would go without him.

Yet when he saw tears fill the eyes of his "true and steadfast" companion, he patted the significant St. on his cap, and added kindly: "Never mind, Biber, everything will be unchanged between us till I obey my summons, and you build your own nest with Kätterle."

So Biberli had remained in Nuremberg whilst Heinz Schorlin, after the Emperor with fatherly kindness had dismissed him, granting him full authority, set forth at the head of his troops as their commander, to take the field against the Siebenburgs and their allies.

The servant was permitted to attend him only to the outskirts of the city.

Before the Spitalthor, Countess Cordula, though she was returning from a ride into the country, had wheeled her spirited dappled horse and joined him as familiarly as though she belonged to him. Heinz, who would have liked best to be alone, and to whom any other companion would have been more welcome, showed her this plainly enough, but she did not seem to notice it, and during the whole of their ride together gave her tongue free rein and, though he often indignantly interrupted her, described with increasing warmth what the Ortlieb sisters had suffered through his fault. In doing so she drew so touching a picture of Eva's silent sorrow that Heinz sometimes longed to thank her, but more frequently to have her driven away by his men at arms; for he had mounted his horse with the intention of dividing the time of his ride between pious meditations and plans for the arrangement of the expedition. What could be more unwelcome than the persistent loquacity of the countess, who filled his heart and mind with ideas and wishes that threatened most seriously to imperil his design?

Cordula plainly perceived how unwillingly he listened. Nay, as Heinz more and more distinctly, at last even offensively, showed her how little he desired her society, it only increased the animation of her speech, which seemed to her not to fail wholly in the influence she desired to exert in Eva's favour; therefore she remained at his side

longer than she had at first intended. She did not even turn back when they met the young Duchess Agnes, who with her train was returning to the city from a ride.

The Bohemian princess had known that Heinz would ride through the Spitalthor at this hour to confront his foe, and had intended that the meeting with her should seem like a good omen. The thought of wishing him success on his journey had been a pleasant one. True, Cordula's presence did not prevent this, but it disturbed her, and she was vexed to find the countess again at Heinz Schorlin's side.

She showed her displeasure so plainly that her Italian singing mistress, the elderly spinster Caterina de Celano, took sides with her, and scornfully asked the countess whether she had brought her curling irons with her.

But she bit her lips at Cordula's swift retort: "O no! Malice meets us on every road, but in Germany we do not pull one another's hair on the highway over every venomous or foolish word."

She turned her back on her as she spoke until the duchess had taken leave of Heinz, and then rode on with him; but as soon as a portion of the road intervened between her and the countess the young Bohemian exclaimed: "We must certainly try to save Sir Heinz from this disagreeable shrew!"

"And the saints will aid the good work," the Italian protested, "for they themselves have a better right to the charming knight. How grave he looked! Take care, your Highness, he is following, as my nimble cousin Frangipani did a short time ago, in the footsteps of the Saint of Assisi."

"But he must not, shall not, go into the monastery!" cried the young duchess, with childish refractoriness. "The Emperor is opposed to it, and he, too, does not like the von Montfort's boisterous manner. We will see whether I cannot accomplish something, Caterina."

Here she stopped. They had again reached the village of Röttenpach, and in front of the newly built little church stood its pastor, with the dignitaries of the parish, and the children were scattering flowers in the path. She checked her Arabian, dismounted, and graciously inspected the new house of God, the pride of the congregation.

On the way home, just beyond the village, her horse again shied. The animal had been startled by an old Minorite monk who sat under a crab-apple tree. It was Father Benedictus, who had set out early to anticipate Heinz and surprise him in his night quarters by his presence. But he had overestimated his strength, and advanced so slowly that Heinz and his troopers, from whom he had concealed himself behind a dusty hawthorn bush, had not seen him. From Schweinau the walk had

become difficult, especially as it was contrary to the teaching of the saint to use a staff. Many a compassionate peasant, many a miller's lad and carter, had offered him a seat on the back of his nag or in his waggon but, without accepting their friendly offers, he had plodded on with his bare feet.

Perhaps this journey would be his last, but on it he would redeem the promise which he had made his dying master, to go forth according to the command of the Saviour, which Francis of Assisi had made his own and that of his order, to preach and to proclaim, "The kingdom of heaven is at hand!"

"Without price," ran the words, "have ye received, without price give." He had no regard for earthly reward, therefore he yearned the more ardently for the glad knowledge that he had saved a soul for heaven.

He had learned to love Heinz as the saint had formerly loved him, and he did not grudge him the happiness which, at the knight's age, had fallen to the lot of the man whose years now numbered eighty. How long he had been permitted to enjoy this bliss! True, during the last decades it had been clouded by many a shadow.

He had endured much hardship in the service of his sacred cause, but the greater the sacrifice he offered the more exquisite was the reward reaped by his soul. Oh, if this pilgrimage might yield

him Heinz Schorlin's vow to follow his saint and with him the Saviour!—if he might be permitted, clasping in his the hand of the beloved youth he had saved, to exchange this world for eternal bliss!

Earth had nothing more to offer; for he who was one of the leaders of his brotherhood beheld with grief their departure from the paths of their founder. Poverty, which secures freedom to the body, which knows nothing of the anxieties of this world and the burden of possession, which permits the soul to soar unfettered far above the dust—poverty, the divine bride of St. Francis, was forsaken in many circles of his brother monks. With property, ease and the longing for secular influence had stolen into many a monastery. Many shunned the labour which the saint enjoined upon his disciples, and the old jugs were often filled with new wine, which he, Benedictus, never tasted, and which the saint rejected as poison. He was no longer young and strong enough to let his grief and indignation rage like a purifying thunderstorm amidst these abuses.

But Heinz Schorlin!

If this youth of noble blood, equally gifted in mind and person, whom Heaven itself had summoned with lightning and thunder, devoted himself from sincere conviction, with a heart full of youthful enthusiasm, to his sacred cause—if Heinz, consecrated by him, and fully aware of the real

purposes of the saint, who, also untaught and rich only in knowledge of the heart, had begun a career so momentous in consequences, announced himself as a fearless champion of St. Francis's will, then the St. George had been found who was summoned to slay the dragon, and with his blood instil new life at last into the monasteries of Germany, then perhaps the fresh prosperity which he desired for the order was at hand. The larger number of its recruits came from the lower ranks of the people. Sir Heinz Schorlin's example would perhaps bring it also, as an elevating element, the sons of his peers.

So, bathed in perspiration, and often on the point of fainting, he followed Heinz through the dust of the highway.

Often, when his strength failed, and he sat down by the roadside to take breath, his soul-life gained a loftier aspiration.

After Heinz rode by without seeing him he continued his way until his feet grew so heavy that he was forced to sit down beside the road. Then he imagined that the Saviour Himself came towards him, gazed lovingly into his face, and turned to beckon some one, Benedictus did not know whom, heavenward. Suddenly the clouds that had covered the sky parted, and the old man fancied he heard the song of the troubadour whose soul had been subdued by love for God, which his friend and master had addressed to his Redeemer. It

must come from the lips of his angels on high, but he longed to join in the strain. True, his aged lips, rapidly as they moved, uttered no sound, but he fancied he was sharing in this song of the soul, glowing with fervent, consuming flames of love, dedicated to the Saviour, the source of all love:

> "Love's flames my kindling heart control,
> Love for my Bridegroom fair,
> When on my hand he placed the ring,
> The Lamb whose fervent love I share
> Did pierce my inmost soul,"

the fiery song began, and an absorbing yearning for death and the beloved Redeemer, whose form had vanished in the sea of flames surging before his dilated eyes, moved the very depths of his soul as he commenced the second verse:

> "My heart amidst Love's tortures broke,
> Slain by the might of Love's keen stroke,
> To earth my senseless body sank,
> Love's flames my life-blood drank."

With flushed cheeks, utterly borne away from the world and everything which surrounded him, he raised his arms towards heaven, then they suddenly fell. Starting up, he passed his hand over his dazzled eyes and shook his head sorrowfully. Instead of the angels' song, he heard the beat of horses' hoofs coming nearer and nearer. The open heavens had closed again; he lay a poor exhausted mortal, with burning brow, beside the road.

Duchess Agnes, after visiting the new church at Röttenpach, rode past him on her return to Nuremberg.

Neither she nor her train heeded the old monk. But the Italian who, as she rode by, had been attracted by the noble features of the aged man, whose eyes still sparkled with youthful enthusiasm, gazed at him enquiringly. Her glance met his, and the Minorite's wrinkled features wore a look of eager enquiry. He longed to rise and ask the name of the black-eyed lady at the duchess's side. But ere he could stand erect, the party had passed on.

Disturbed in mind, and scarcely able to set one sore foot before the other, he dragged himself forward.

Before he reached Röttenpach he met one of the duchess's pages who had remained at the village forge and was now riding after his mistress. Father Benedictus called to him, and the boy, awed by the grey-haired monk, answered his questions, and told him that the lady on the horse with the white star on its face was the duchess's Italian singing mistress, Caterina de Celano.

Every drop of blood receded from the Minorite's fever-flushed cheeks, and the page was about to spring from his saddle to support him, but the monk waved him back impatiently, and by the exertion of all his strength of will forced himself to stagger on.

He had just felt happy in the heart of eternal love; but now the expression of his countenance changed, and his dark, sunken eyes flashed angrily.

The faded woman beside the duchess bore the name of the lady whose faithlessness had first induced him to seek rest and forgetfulness in the peace of the cloister, and led him to despise her whole sex.

The horsewoman must be a granddaughter, daughter, or niece of the woman who had so basely betrayed him. How much she resembled the traitress, but she did not understand how to hide her real nature as well; her faded features wore a somewhat malicious expression. The resentment which he thought he had conquered again awoke. He would have liked to rush after her and call her to her face——. Yet what would that avail? How was she to blame for the treachery of another person, whom perhaps she did not even know?

Yet he longed to follow her.

His fevered blood urged him on, but his exhausted, aching limbs refused to serve him. One more violent effort, and sparks flashed before his eyes, his lips were wet with blood, and he sank gasping on the ground.

After some time he succeeded in dragging himself to the side of the road, where he lay until a Nuremberg carrier, passing with his team of four

horses, lifted him, with the help of his servant, into his cart and took him on.

At Schweinau the jolting of the vehicle became unendurable to the sufferer, and the carrier willingly fulfilled his wish to be taken to the hospital where mangled criminals, tortured by the rack, were nursed.

There, however, they instantly perceived that his place was not in this house dedicated to criminal misfortune, and the kind Beguines of Schweinau took charge of him.

On the way the old monk suffered severely in both soul and body. It seemed like treason, like a rejection of his pure and pious purposes, that Heaven itself barred the path along which he was wearily wandering to win it a soul.

CHAPTER VI.

THE entombment of the magnificent coffin of Frau Maria Ortlieb under the pavement of the family chapel was over. The little group of sympathising friends had left the church. Only the widower and his daughters remained, and when he knew that he could no longer be seen by the few who still lingered in the house of God, he clasped the two girls to his heart with a suppressed sob.

Never had he experienced such deep sorrow, such anguish of soul. He had not even been permitted to take leave of his beloved companion with unmixed grief; fierce resentment had mingled with his trouble.

To remain alone in the house with his daughters after the burial and answer their questions seemed to him impossible.

The meeting of the Council, which would soon begin, served as a pretence for leaving them. Eva was to blame for what he had just suffered; but he knew everything concerning the rumours about the inexperienced girl and Heinz Schorlin, and therefore was aware that her fault was trivial. To cen-

sure her seemed as difficult as to discuss calmly with her and the sensible Els what could be done under existing circumstances; besides, he was firmly convinced that Eva had nothing left except to take, without delay, the veil for which she had longed from childhood. His sister, the Abbess Kunigunde, was keeping the door of the convent open. She had promised the girl to await her at home. In taking leave of his daughters, he begged them not to wait for him, because the Council were to decide the fate of the Eysvogel business, and the session might last a long while.

Then his Els gazed at him with a look of such earnest entreaty that he nodded, and in a tone of the warmest compassion began: "I shall be more than glad to aid your Wolff, my dear girl, but he himself told you how the case stands. What would it avail if I beggared myself and you for the Eysvogels and their tottering house? I must remain hard now, in order later to smooth the path for Wolff and you, Els. If Berthold Vorchtel would make up his mind to join me, it might be different, but he summoned the Council as a complainant, and if he is the one to overthrow the reeling structure, who can blame him? We shall see. Whatever I can reasonably do for the unfortunate family shall be accomplished, my girl."

Then he kissed his older daughter on the forehead, hastily gave the younger the same caress, and left the chapel. But Els detained him, whisper-

ing: "Whatever wrong was inflicted upon us yesterday, do not let it prejudice you, father. It was meant neither for her whose peace nothing can now disturb, nor for you. We alone——"

"You certainly," Herr Ernst interrupted bitterly, "were made to feel how far superior in virtue they considered themselves to you, who are better and purer than all of them. But keep up Eva's courage. I have been talking with your Uncle Pfinzing and your Aunt Christine. You yourself took them into your confidence, and we will consult together how the serpent's head is to be crushed."

He turned away as he spoke, but Els went back to her sister, and after a brief prayer they left the church with bowed heads.

The sedan-chairs were waiting outside. Each was to be borne home separately, but both preferred, spite of the bright summer weather, to draw the curtains, that unseen they might weep, and ask themselves how such wrongs could have been inflicted upon the dead woman and themselves.

The respect of high and low for the Ortlieb family had been most brilliantly displayed when the body of the son, slain in battle, had been interred in the chapel of his race. And their mother? How many had held her dear! to how many she had been kind, loving, and friendly! How great a sympathy the whole city had shown

during her illness, and how many of all classes had attended the mass for her soul! And the burial which had just taken place?

True, on her father's account all the members of the Council were present, but scarcely half the wives had appeared. Their daughters—Els had counted them—numbered only nine, and but three were included among her friends. The others had probably come out of curiosity. And the common people, the artisans, the lower classes, who in countless numbers had accompanied her brother's coffin to its resting place, and during the mass for the dead had crowded the spacious nave of St. Sebald's? There had been now only a scanty group. The nuns from the convent were present, down to the most humble lay Sister; but they were under great obligations to her mother, and their abbess was her father's sister. There were few other women except the old crones from the hospitals and nurseries, who were never absent when there was an opportunity to weep or to backbite. In going through the nave of the church into the chapel the sisters had passed a group of younger lads and maidens, who had nudged one another in so disrespectful a way, whispering all sorts of things, that Els had tried to draw Eva past them as swiftly as possible.

Her wish to keep her more sensitive sister from noticing the disagreeable gestures and insulting words of the cruel youths and girls was

gratified. True, Eva also felt with keen indignation that far too little honour was paid to her beloved dead; that the blinded people believed the slanderers who repeated even worse things of her Els than of herself, and made their poor mother, who had lived and suffered like a saint, atone for what they imagined were the sins of her daughters; but the jeers and scorn which had obtruded themselves upon her father and sister from more than one quarter, in many a form, had entirely escaped her notice. She had accustomed herself from childhood to indulge in reflections and emotions apart from the demands of the world. Whatever occupied her mind or soul absorbed her completely; here she had been wholly engrossed in this silent intercourse with the departed, and a single glance at the group assembled in the church had showed her everything which she desired to know of her surroundings.

Heinz had gone to the field the day before yesterday. Her silent colloquy concerned him also. How difficult he made it for her to maintain the resolution which she had formed during the mass for the dead, since he remained aloof, without giving even the slightest token of remembrance. True, an inward voice constantly repeated that he could not part from her any more easily than she from him; but her maidenly pride rebelled against the neglect with which he grieved her. The defiant desire to punish him for

departing without a word of farewell urged her back to the convent. She had spent many hours there daily, and in its atmosphere of peace felt better and happier than in her father's house or any other spot which she visited. The close association with her aunt, the abbess, was renewed. True, she had not urged Eva to a definite statement by so much as a single word, yet she had made her feel plainly how deeply it would wound her if her pupil should resolve to disappoint the hopes which she herself had fostered. If Eva refused to take the veil, would not her kind friend be justified in charging her with unequalled ingratitude? and whose opinion did she value even half as much, if she excepted her lover's, whose approval was more to her than that of all the rest of the world?

He was better than she, and who could tell what important motive kept him away? Countless worldly wishes had blended with the devotion which she felt in the convent; and had not the abbess herself taught her to obey, without regard to individuals or their opinion, the demands of her own nature, which were in harmony with the will of the Most High? and how loudly every voice within commanded her to be loyal to her love! She had made her decision, but offended pride, the memory of the happy, peaceful hours in the convent and, above all, the fear of grieving the beloved guide of her childhood, withheld her from

the firm and irrevocable statement to which her nature, averse to hesitation and delay, impelled her.

The nearer the sedan-chair came to the Ortlieb mansion the faster her heart beat, for that very day, probably within the next few hours, the abbess would compel her to choose between her father's house and the convent.

She was panting for breath and deadly pale when, just after Els's arrival, she stepped from the chair. It had become intensely hot. Within the vaulted corridor with its solid, impenetrable walls, a cooler atmosphere received her, and she hoped to find in her own chamber fresher, purer air, and —at least for the next few hours—undisturbed peace.

But what was the meaning of this scene? At her entrance, the conversation which Els had evidently just commenced with several other women at the door of the office suddenly ceased. It must be due to consideration for her; for she had not failed to notice the significant glance with which her sister looked at her and then removed her finger from her lips.

The abbess, who had been concealed by a wall of chests piled one above another, now came forward and laid her hand upon the shoulder of a little elderly woman, who must have been disputing vehemently with the old housekeeper, Martsche, for she was flushed with

excitement, and the housekeeper's chin still quivered.

Usually Eva paid little heed to the quarrels of the servants, but this one appeared to have some connection with herself, and the cause could be no trivial one, since Aunt Kunigunde took part in it.

But she had no sooner approached the other women than the abbess drew her aside and asked her a few unimportant questions. They were probably intended to keep her away from the disputants. But Eva knew the little woman, and wished to learn what offence had been given modest, humble Widow Vorkler. Her husband had been employed by the Ortlieb firm as a carrier, who had driven his team of six horses to Milan faithfully until killed in the Tyrol during an attack by robber knights in the lawless period before the coronation of the Emperor Rudolph.

With the aid of Herr Ernst Ortlieb, the widow had then set up a little shop for the sale of wax candles, images of the saints, rosaries, and modest confirmation gifts, by which means she gained an honest livelihood for her seven children and herself. Her oldest son, who on account of hip disease was not fit for hard work, helped her, and the youngest was Ortel, who had carried Eva's basket on the day of her dead mother's consecration. Her daughter Metz was also in the Ortlieb's service as assistant to the chief cook.

When Frau Vorkler had come to see her chil-

dren, she had scarcely been able to find words which sufficiently expressed her grateful appreciation, but to-day she seemed like a different person.

The brief colloquy between the abbess and Eva already appeared to her too long, and when the former bade her finish her business later with Els and old Martsche, she angrily declared that, with all due reverence for the Lady Abbess, she must inform Jungfrau Eva also what compelled her, a virtuous woman with a grateful heart, to take her children from the service of the employer for whom her husband had sacrificed his life.

Els, who was eager to conceal the woman's insulting errand from Eva, tried to silence Frau Vorkler, but she defiantly persisted, and with redoubled zeal protested that speak she must or her heart would break. Then she declared that she had been proud to place her children in so godly a household, but now everything was changed, and though it grieved her to the soul, she must insist upon taking Metz and Ortel from its service. She lived by the piety of people who bought candles for the dear saints and rosaries for praying; but even the most devout had eyes everywhere, and if it were known that her young children were serving in a house where such things happened, as alas! were reported through the whole city concerning the daughters of this family——

Here old Martsche with honest indignation

interrupted the excited woman; but Frau Vorkler would not be silenced, and asked what a poor girl like her Metz possessed except her good name. How quickly suspicion would rest on a lass whose respectability was questioned! People had begun to do so ever since the Ortlieb sisters were called the "beautiful" instead of the pious and virtuous Es. This showed how such notice of the face and figure benefited Christian maidens. Yesterday and to-day she had given a three-farthing candle to her saint as a thank offering that this horror had not reached their mother's ears. The dead woman had been a truly devout and noble lady, and her soul would be grateful to her for impressing upon the minds of her motherless daughters that the path which they had recklessly entered——

This was too much for Ortel, who, concealed behind a heap of sacks, had listened to the discussion, and clasping his hands beseechingly, he now went up to his mother and entreated her to beware of repeating the slanders of evil-minded people who had dared to cast stones at the gracious maidens, who were as pure and innocent as their saint herself.

Poor Ortel! His kind young eyes streaming with tears might have softened a rock; but the enraged candle-dealer misinterpreted his honest emotion, and he certainly would not have been allowed to go on so far had not rage and amazement kept her silent. But Frau Vorkler never lost the use of

her tongue long, and what a flood of abuse of the degenerate children of the time, who forgot the respect and gratitude due to their own mother, she began to pour forth! But when faithful Endres, who had grown grey in the Ortlieb service, and under whose orders Ortel was placed to help in unpacking, commanded her to be silent or leave the house, and told her son, instead of following her, to stay with his old employer, Frau Vorkler proceeded to lament over the corruption of the whole world, and did not fail to deal a few side-thrusts at the two daughters of the house.

But here also she made little progress, for the abbess led Eva up the stairs, and the two old family servants, Martsche representing the guiding mind and Endres the rude strength, made common cause. The latter upheld Ortel in his refusal to leave the house, and the former declared that Metz must remain the usual time after giving notice. She would not help Frau Vorkler to force the poor child into an unequal, miserable marriage with the old miser to whom she wanted to give her.

This remark was aimed at the master-tailor Seubolt, the guardian of the Vorkler children, who, though forty years her senior, wanted to make pretty Metz his wife, and who had also promised the widow to obtain for his future brother-in-law Ortel an excellent place in the

stables of the German order of military monks. Not outraged morality, but the guardian and suitor in one person, had induced the candle-dealer to take her children from their good places in the Ortlieb household. The widow's fear of having her real motive detected spared the necessity of using force. But whilst slowly retiring backwards, crab fashion, she shrieked at her antagonists the threat that her children's guardian, no less a personage than master-tailor Nickel Seubolt, was a man who would help her gain her just rights and snatch the endangered souls of Ortel and her poor young Metz from temporal and eternal destruction in this Sodom and Gomorrah——

The rest of the burden which oppressed her soul she was forced to confide to the street. Endres closed the heavy door of the house behind her with a strength and celerity marvellous in a man of his years.

Ortel was terribly agitated. Soon after his mother's departure he went with his sister to the woodhouse, where both wept bitterly; for Metz had given her heart to a young carrier who was expected to return from a trip to Frankfort the first of July, and would rather have thrown herself into the Pegnitz than married the rich old tailor to whom she knew her mother had promised her pretty daughter; whilst her brother, like many youths of his station, thought that the place of driver of a six-horse wain

was the most delightful calling in the world, and both were warmly attached to their employer and the family whom they served. And yet both felt that it was a heavy sin to refuse to obey their mother.

CHAPTER VII.

Eva was spared witnessing the close of this unpleasant incident. The abbess had led her up the stairs into the sitting-room. St. Clare herself, she thought, had sent Frau Vorkler to render the choice she intended to place before her niece that very day easier for Eva.

Even whilst ascending the broad steps she put her arm around her, but in the apartment, whence the noonday sun had been shut out and they were greeted with a cool atmosphere perfumed with the fragrance of the bouquets of roses and mignonette which Eva and the gardener had set in jars on the mantelpiece early in the morning, the abbess drew her darling closer to her side, saying, "The world is again showing you its most disagreeable face, my poor child, ere you bid it farewell."

She kissed her brow and eyes tenderly as she spoke, expecting Eva, as she had often done when anything troubled her young soul, to return the caress impulsively, and accept with grateful impetuosity the invitation to the shelter which she offered; but the vile assault of the coarse woman

who brought to her knowledge what people were thinking and saying about her produced upon the strange child, who had already given her many a surprise, an effect precisely opposite to her expectations. No, Eva had by no means forgotten the pain inflicted by Frau Vorkler's base accusations; but if whilst in the sedan-chair she had feared that she should lack courage to inflict upon her beloved aunt and friend so great a disappointment, she now felt that this dread had been needless, and that her offended maidenly pride absolved her from consideration for any person.

With cautious tenderness she released herself from the arms of the abbess, gazed sorrowfully at her with her large eyes as if beseeching forgiveness then, as she saw her aunt look at her with pained surprise, again threw herself on her breast.

Instead of being protectingly embraced by the elder woman, the young girl clasped her closely to her heart, kissed and patted her with caressing love, and with the winning charm peculiar to her besought her forgiveness if she denied herself and her that which she had long desired as the fairest and noblest goal.

When the abbess interrupted her to represent what awaited her in the world and in the convent, Eva listened, nestling closely to her side until she had finished, then sighing as deeply as if her own resolve caused her the keenest suffering, threw her

head back, exclaiming, "Yet, in spite of everything, I cannot, must not enter the convent now."

Clasping the abbess's hand, she explained what prevented her from fulfilling the wish of her childhood's guide, which had so long been her own, extolling with warm, sincere gratitude the quiet happiness and sweet anticipations enjoyed with her beloved nuns ere love had conquered her.

During the recent days of sorrow she had again sought the path to her saints and found the greatest solace in prayer; but whenever she uplifted her heart to the Saviour, whose bride she had once so fervently vowed to become, the Redeemer had indeed appeared as usual before the eyes of her soul, but he resembled in form and features Sir Heinz Schorlin, and, instead of turning her away from the world to divine love, she had surrendered herself completely to earthly affection. Prayer had become sin. The saint's song—

> "O Love, Love's reign announcing,
> Why dost thou wound me so?
> Into thy fiercest flames I fling
> My heart, my life below."

no longer invited her to give herself up to be fused into divine love, but merely rendered the need of her own soul clearer, and expressed in words the yearning of her heart for her lover.

Here her aunt interrupted her with the assurance that all this—she had had the same experience

when, renouncing the love of the noblest and best of men, she took the veil—would be different, wholly different, when with St. Clare's aid she had again found the path on which she had already once so nearly reached heaven. Even now she beheld in imagination the day when Eva would look back upon the world she had left as if it were a mere formless mass of clouds. These were no idle words. The promise was something derived from her own experience.

On her pilgrimage to Rome she had gazed from an Alpine peak and beheld at her feet nothing save low hills, forests, valleys, and flashing streams, with here and there a village; but she could distinguish neither human beings nor animals; a light mist had veiled everything, converting it into one monotonous surface. But above her head the sky, like a giant dome free from cloud and mist, arched in a beautiful vault, blue as turquoise and sapphire. It seemed so close that the eagle soaring near her might reach it with a few strokes of his pinions. She was steeped in radiance, and the sun shone down upon her with overpowering brilliancy like the eye of God.

Close at her side a gay butterfly hovered about the solitary little white flower which grew from a bare rock on the topmost summit. In the brilliant light and amidst the solemn silence that butterfly seemed like a transfigured soul, and aroused the

question, Who that was permitted to live on this glowing height, so near the Most High, could desire to return to the grey mist below?

So the human soul which soared to the shining height where it was so near heaven, would blissfully enjoy the purity of the air and the unshadowed light which bathed it, and all that was passing in the world below would blend into a single vanquished whole, whose details could no longer be distinguished. Thus Heinz Schorlin's image would also mingle with the remainder of the world, lying far below her, to which he belonged. It should merely incite her to rise nearer and nearer to heaven, to the radiant light above, to which her soul would mount as easily as the eagle that before the pilgrim's eyes had vanished in the divine blue and the golden sunshine.

"So come and dare the flight!" she concluded with warm enthusiasm. "The wings you need have grown from your soul, you chosen bride of Heaven. Use them. That which now most repels you from the goal will fall away as the snake sheds its skin. Like the phœnix rising from its ashes, the destruction of the little earthly love which even now causes you more pain than pleasure, will permit the ascent of the great love for Him Who is Love incarnate, the love which encompasses the lonely butterfly on the white blossom in the silent, deserted mountain solitude, which lacks no feather on its wings, no tiniest hair on its feelers, as warmly

and carefully as the vast, unlimited universe whose duration ends only with eternity."

Eva, with labouring breath, had fairly hung upon the lips of the revered woman, who at last gazed upwards with dilated eyes like a prophetess.

When she paused the young girl nodded assent. Her teacher and friend seemed to have crushed her resistance.

Like the eagle which had disappeared before the pilgrim's eyes in the azure vault of heaven, the radiant light on the pure summit summoned her pure soul to dare the flight.

The abbess watched with delight the influence of her words upon the soul of her darling, who, gazing thoughtfully at the floor, now seemed to be pondering over what she had urged.

But suddenly Eva raised her bowed head, and her eyes, sparkling with a brighter light, sought those of the abbess.

Her quick intellect had attentively considered what she had heard, and her vivid power of imagination had enabled her to transfer to reality the picture which had already half won her over to her friend's wishes.

"No, Aunt Kunigunde, no!" she began, raising her hands as if in repulse. "Your radiant height strongly allures me also, yet, gladly as I believe that for many the world would be easily forgotten above, where no sound from it reaches us and the mist conceals individual figures from our eyes, for

me, now that love has filled my heart, it would be impossible to ascend the peak alone and without him.

"Hear me, aunt!

"What was it that attracted me so powerfully from the beginning? At first, as you know, the hope of making him a combatant for the possessions which I have learned through you to regard as the highest and most sacred. Then, when love came, when a new power, heretofore unknown, awoke within me and—everything must be told—I longed for his wooing and his embrace, I also felt that our union could take root and put forth blossoms only in the full harmony of our mutual love for God and the Saviour. And though since the mass for the dead was celebrated for my mother—it wounded me, and defiance and the wish to punish him urged me to put the convent walls between us—no further token of his love has come, though I know as well as you that he desired to quit the world, this by no means impairs—nay, it only strengthens—the confidence I feel that our souls belong to one another as inseparably as though the sacrament had hallowed our union.

"Therefore I should never succeed in coming so near heaven as you, the lonely, devout pilgrim, attained on the summit of your mountain peak, unless he accompanied me in spirit, unless his soul joined mine in the ascent or the flight. It rests in mine as mine rests in his, and were they separated

both would bleed as if from severed veins. For this reason, aunt, he can never blend into a uniform mass with the rest of the world below me; for if I gained the radiant height, he would remain at my side and gaze with me at the mist-veiled world beneath. He can never vanish from the eyes of my soul, and so, dear aunt, because I owe it to him to avoid even the semblance——"

Here she hesitated; for from the adjoining room they heard a man's deep voice telling Els something in loud, excited tones.

This interruption was welcome to the abbess; she had as yet found no answer to her niece's startling objection.

Eva answered her questioning glance with the exclamation, "Uncle Pfinzing!"

"He?" replied the abbess dejectedly. "His opinion has some weight with you, and this very day, during the burial, he told me how glad he should be to see you sheltered in the convent from the hateful calumnies caused by your imprudence!"

"Yet—you will see it directly," the girl declared, "he will surely understand me when I explain that I would rather endure the worst than appear to seek refuge from evil tongues in flight. Whoever has expected Eva Ortlieb to shelter herself from malice behind strong walls will be mistaken. Heinz is certainly aware of the shameful injustice which has pursued us, and

if he returns he must find me where he left me. I am now encountering what my dead mother called the forge fire of life, and I will not shun it like a coward. Heinz, I know, will overthrow the man who unchained this generation of vipers against us; but if he does not return, or can bring himself to cast the love that unites us behind him with the world from which he would fain turn, then, aunt"—and Eva's eyes flashed brightly with passionate fire, and her clear voice expressed the firm decision of a vigorous will—"then I will commit our cause to One who will not suffer falsehood to conquer truth or wrong to triumph over right. Then, though it should be necessary to walk over red-hot ploughshares, let the ordeal bear witness for us."

The abbess, startled, yet rejoicing at the fulness of faith flaming in her darling's passionate speech, approached Eva to soothe her; but scarcely had she begun to speak when the door opened and Berthold Pfinzing entered with his older niece.

He was holding Els by the hand, and it was evident that some sorrowful thought occupied the minds of both.

"Has any new horror happened?" fell in tones of anxious enquiry from Eva's lips before she even greeted her dearest relative.

"Think of something very bad," was her sister's reply, in a tone so dejected and mournful,

that Eva, with a low cry—"My father!"—pressed her hand upon her heart.

"Not dead, darling," said the magistrate, stroking her head soothingly with his short, broad hand, "by all the saints, not even wounded or ill. Yet the daughter has guessed aright, and I have kept the 'Honourables' waiting, that I might tell you the news myself; for what may not such tidings become whilst passing from lip to lip! It is a toad, a very ugly toad, and I would not permit a dragon to be brought into the house to you poor things in its place."

He poured all this forth very rapidly, for, notwithstanding the intense heat, and the burden of business at the Town Hall, he had left it, though only to do his dear Es a kindness. He and his worthy wife Christine, the sister of Herr Ernst Ortlieb and of the abbess, had long been familiar with all the tales which slander had called to life, and had striven zealously enough to refute them. What he had now to relate filled him with honest indignation against the evil tongues, and he knew how deeply it would excite and grieve Eva, his godchild, who stood especially near his heart. He would gladly have said a few kind words to her before beginning his story, but he was obliged to return to the Town Hall immediately to open the important conference concerning the fate of the Eysvogel business.

His appearance showed how rapidly he had

hurried to the house through the burning sunshine, for drops of perspiration were trickling down his broad, low forehead over his plump, smooth-shaven cheeks and thick red neck, in which his small chin vanished as if it were a cushion. Besides, he constantly raised a large linen handkerchief to his face, and his huge chest laboured for breath as he hastily repeated to Eva and the abbess what he had just announced to Els in a few rapid words.

Herr Ernst Ortlieb had gone to the Town Hall, where he attended an examination in his character as magistrate, and had entered the court-yard to enjoy the cool air for a short time with a few other "Honourables," in the shady walk near the main gate.

Just then master-tailor Seubolt, the guardian of Ortel and his sister, who were in service at the Ortlieb mansion, approached the Town Hall. No one could have supposed that the tall, grey-headed man with the bowed back, who was evidently nearing sixty, really meant to make a young girl like Metz Vorkler his wife. Besides, he assumed a very humble, modest demeanour when, passing through the vaulted entrance of the Town Hall, which stood open to every citizen, he approached Herr Ernst to ask, with many bows and humble phrases, for the permission, which he had been refused at the Ortlieb house, to remove his wards from a place which their mother, as well as he himself, felt sure—he had supposed that the "Hon-

ourable" would have no objection—would be harmful to them in both body and soul.

Surprised and indignant, but perfectly calm, Herr Ernst had requested him to tell him whatever he had to say at a more convenient time. But as the tailor insisted that the matter would permit no delay, he invited him to step aside with him, in order not to make the councillors who were with him witnesses of the unpleasant discussion.

Seubolt, however, seemed to have no greater desire than to be heard by as many people as possible. Raising his voice to a very loud tone, though he still maintained an extremely humble manner, he began to give the reasons which induced him, spite of his deep regret, to remove his wards from the Ortlieb house. And now, sheltering himself behind frequent repetitions of "As people say" and "Heaven forbid that I should believe such things," he began to relate what the most venomous slander had dared to assert concerning the beautiful Es.

For a time Herr Ernst had forced himself to listen quietly to this malicious abuse of those whom he held dearest, but at last it became too much for the quick-tempered man. The tailor had ventured to allude to Jungfrau Els "who certainly had scarcely given full cause for such evil slander" in words which caused even the councillors standing near to contradict him loudly, and induced

Herr Pfinzing, who had just come up, to beckon to the city soldiers. At that instant the blood mounted to the insulted father's brain, and the misfortune happened; for as the tailor, with an unexpected gesture of the arm he was flourishing, brushed Herr Ernst's cap, the latter, fairly insane with rage, snatched the pike from one of the men who, obeying Herr Pfinzing's signal, were just approaching the tailor, and with a wild cry struck down the base traducer.

Herr Pfinzing, with the presence of mind characteristic of him, instantly ordered the beadles to carry the wounded man into the Town Hall, and thus prevented the luckless deed of violence from creating any excitement.

The few persons in the courtyard had been detained, and perhaps everything might yet be well. Herr Ernst had instantly delivered himself up to justice, and instead of being taken to prison like a common criminal, had been conveyed in a closed sedan-chair to the watch-tower.

The pike had pierced the tailor's shoulder, but the wound did not seem to be mortal, and Herr Ernst's rash deed might be made good by the payment of blood-money, though, it is true, on account of the tailor's position and means, this might be a large sum.

"My horse," said Herr Berthold in conclusion, "was waiting for me, and brought me here as swiftly as he must carry me back again. But, you poor

things! as for you, my Els, you have a firm nature, and if you insist upon refusing the invitation to our house, why, wait here to learn whether your father needs you. You, my little goddaughter Eva, are provided for. This sorrow, of course, will throw the veil over your fair head."

The worthy man, as he spoke, laid his hand on her shoulder and looked at her with a glance which seemed to rely on her assent, but she interrupted him with the exclamation, "No, uncle! Until you have convinced yourself that no one will dare assail Eva Ortlieb's honour, do not ask her again if she desires the protection of the convent."

The magistrate hurriedly passed his huge handkerchief over his face; then taking Eva's head between his hands, kissed her brow, and turning the shrewd, twinkling eyes, which were as round as everything else about his person, towards the others, said: "Did any one suggest this, or did the 'little saint' have the sensible idea herself?"

When Eva, smiling, pointed to her own forehead, he exclaimed: "My respects, child. They say that what stirs up there descends from godfather to godchild, and I'll never put goblet to my lips again if I——"

Here he stopped, and called after Els that he had not meant to hint, for she was hurrying out to

get her uncle something to drink. But ere the door closed behind her he went on eagerly:

"But to you, my saintly child, I will say: your piety soars far too high for me to follow with my heavy body; yet on the ride here I, old sinner that I am, longed—no offence, sister-in-law abbess!—to warn you against the convent, for the very reason which keeps you away from your saint. We'll find the gag to stop the mouths of these accursed slanderers forever, and then, if you want to enter the convent, they shall not say, when you take the veil, 'Eva Ortlieb is hiding from her own shame and the tricks with which we frightened her out of the world.' No! All Nuremberg shall join in the hosanna!"

Then taking the goblet which Els had just filled, he drained it with great satisfaction, and rushing off, called back to the sisters: "I'll soon see you again, you brave little Es. My wife is coming to talk over the matter with you. Don't let that worthless candle-dealer's children leave the house till their time is up. If you wish to visit your father in the watch-tower there will be no difficulty. I'll tell the warder. Only the drawbridge will be raised after sunset. You can provide for his bodily needs, too, Els. We cannot release him yet; the law must take its course."

At the door he stopped again and called back into the room: "We can't be sure. If Frau Vorkler and the tailor's friends make an outcry

and molest you, send at once to the Town Hall. I'll keep my eyes open and give the necessary orders."

A few minutes after he trotted through the Frauenthor on his clumsy stallion.

CHAPTER VIII.

The watch-tower was in the northern part of the city, in the corn magazine of the fortress, and the whole width of Nuremberg must be traversed to reach it. Even before Herr Pfinzing had left the house the sisters determined to go to their father, and the abbess approved the plan. She invited the girls to spend the night at the convent, if they found the deserted house too lonely, but they did not promise to do so.

Countess Cordula, who was on friendly terms with Eva, also emptied the vials of her wrath with all the impetuosity of her nature upon Sir Seitz Siebenburg and the credulity and malice of the people. From the beginning she had been firmly convinced that the "Mustache," as she now called the knight in a tone of the most intense aversion, had contrived this base conspiracy, and her opinion was strengthened by Biberli. Now she would gladly have torn herself into pieces to mitigate the sisters' hard lot. She wanted to accompany them to the watch-tower, to have them taken there in her sedan-chair carried by horses, which had room

for several persons, and at last begged for the favour of being allowed to spend the night in the room adjoining theirs. If the girls, amidst all these base suspicions, should find Nuremberg unendurable, she would leave the scene of the Reichstag with them to-morrow, if necessary, and take them to her castle in the Vorarlberg. She had other plans for them, too, in her mind, but lacked time now to explain them to the sisters; they could not obtain admittance to their father's prison after sundown, and in a few hours the long summer day would be over.

It was not advisable to use their sedan-chairs adorned with the Ortlieb coat of arms, which every one knew, so they went on foot with their faces shrouded by the 'Reise' which was part of their mourning dress; and, in order not to violate usage, were accompanied by two servants, old Martsche and Kätterle.

From the Fleischbrücke they might have avoided the market-place, but Els wanted to enquire whether the Eysvogel matter was being discussed. One of the "Honourables"—all of whom she knew—was always to be found near the Town Hall, and Eva understood her sister's anxiety and went with her willingly.

But when they were passing the prison she became frightened.

Through the squares formed by the iron grating in front of the broad window of the largest

one, head after head, hand after hand, was thrust into the street. The closely cropped heads of the prisoners, many of which showed mutilations by the hand of the executioner, which had barely healed, formed, as separated only by the iron bars, they protruded above, below, and beside one another into the open air, a mosaic picture, startlingly repulsive in appearance; for savage greed glittered in the eyes of most, and showed itself in the movements of the long, thin hands extended for gifts. Bitter need and passionate longing gazed defiantly, beseechingly, and threateningly at the people who crowded round the window. Few were silent; they implored the curious and pitying men, women, and children, who in the presence of their misery rejoiced in their more favoured lot, for aid in their distress, and rarely in vain; for many a mother gave her children a loaf to hand to the unfortunates, and meanwhile impressed on their minds the lesson that they would fare as badly as the most horrible of the mutilated prisoners unless they were good and obedient to their parents and teachers.

Street boys held out an apple or a bit of bread, to snatch it away just as they touched it with their finger-tips, thus playing with them for their own amusement, but the tribulation of the wretched captives. Then some man who had seen better days, or a criminal whom sudden passion had made a murderer, would burst into a rage and, seizing

the iron bars, shake them savagely, whilst the others, shrieking, drew in their heads. Then fierce curses, threats, and invectives echoed over the market-place and, screaming aloud, the boys ran back; but they soon resumed their malicious sport.

Often, it is true, a mother came who placed her gift in the hands of her child, or a modest old woman, tradesman, or soldier, from motives of genuine compassion, offered the prisoners a jug of new milk or strengthening wine. Nor was there any lack of priests or monks who desired to give the consolations of religion to the pitiable men behind the bars, but most of them reaped little gratitude; only a few listened to their exhortations with open hearts, and but too frequently they were silenced by insults and rude outcries.

Whilst the sisters, attended by their maid-servants, were passing these pitiable people, Frau Tucher, whose daughter had been very ill, sent, for the love of God, a large basket of freshly baked bread to the prisoners. One of her servants was distributing it, and they greedily snatched the welcome gift from his hand. A woman, who was about to give one of the rolls to the hollow-eyed child in her arms just as a rude fellow who had lost his ears snatched it, scratched his dirty, freckled face with her sharp nails, and the sight of the blood which dripped from his lip over his chin upon the roll was so hideous a spectacle that Eva clung closer to her sister, who had just put her

hand into the pocket hanging from her belt to give the unfortunates a few shillings, and drew her away with her.

Both, followed by the two maids, made their way as fast as possible through the people who had flocked hither in great numbers for a purpose which the sisters were to learn only too soon.

It was a long time since they had been here, and a few weeks previously the "Honourables" had had the pillory moved from the other side of the Town Hall to this spot. Kätterle's warning was not heard in the din around them.

The crowd grew denser every moment, and Eva had already asked her sister to turn back, when Els saw the man who brought to her father the summons to the meetings of the Council, and requested him to accompany them through the throng to the courtyard; but amidst the uproar of shouts and cries he misunderstood her, and supposing that she wished to witness the spectacle which had attracted so many, forced a way for the sisters into the very front rank.

The person who had just been bound in this place of shame was the barber's widow from the Kotgasse, who had already been here once for giving lovers an opportunity for secret meetings, and to whom Kätterle had fled for shelter. Bowed by the weight of the stone which had been hung around her neck, the woman, with outstretched head, looked furiously around the circle of her

tormentors like a wild beast crouched to spring, and scarcely had the messenger brought the sisters and their servants to a place near her when, recognising Kätterle, she shrieked shrilly to the crowd that there were the right ones, the dainty folk who, if they did not belong to a rich family, would be put in the place where, in spite of the Riese over their faces, with which they mourned for their lost good name, they had more reason to be than she, who was only the lowly widow of a barber.

Overwhelmed with horror the girls pressed on, and at Eva's terrified exclamation, "Let us, O let us go!" the man did his best. But they made slow progress through the crowd, whose yells, hisses, and catcalls pursued them to the entrance of the neighbouring Town Hall.

Here the guard, with crossed halberds, kept back the people who were crowding after the insulted girls, and it was fortunate, for Eva's feet refused to carry her farther, and her older sister's strength to support her failed.

Sighing deeply, Els led her to a bench which stood between two pillars, and then ordered old Martsche, and Kätterle, who was trembling in every limb, to watch Eva till her return.

Before they went on, her sister must have some rest, and Martin Schedel, the old Clerk of the Council, was the man with whom to obtain it.

She went in search of him as fast as her feet would bear her, and by a lucky accident met the

kind old man, whom she had known from childhood, on the stairs leading to the Council chamber and the upper offices.

Ernst Ortlieb's unhappy deed, and the story of the base calumnies in circulation about the unfortunate man's daughters, which he had just heard from Herr Pfinzing, had filled the worthy old clerk's heart with pity and indignation; so he eagerly embraced the opportunity afforded to atone to the young girls for the wrongs committed against them by their fellow-citizens. Telling the maidservants to wait in the antechamber of the orphan's court-room, he led the sisters to his own office, helping Eva up the long flight of stairs with an arm which, though aged, was still vigorous. After insisting that she should sit in the armchair before the big desk, and placing wine and water before her, he begged the young girls to wait until his return. He was obliged to be present at the meeting, which had probably already begun. The matter in question was the Eysvogel business, and if Els would remain he could tell her the result. Then he left them.

Eva, deadly pale, leaned back with closed eyes in the clerk's high chair. Els bathed her brow with a wet handkerchief, consoling her by representing how foolish it would be to suffer the lowest of the populace to destroy her happiness.

Her sister nodded assent, saying: "Did you notice the faces of those people behind the bars?

Most of them, I thought, looked stupid rather than evil." Here she hesitated, and then added thoughtfully: "Yet they cannot be wise. These poor creatures seldom obtain any great sum by thieving and cheating. To what terrible punishments they expose themselves both in this world and the next! And conscience!"

"Yes, conscience!" Els eagerly repeated. "So long as we can say that we have done nothing wrong, we can suffer even the worst to be said of us without grieving."

"Still," sighed Eva, "I feel as if that horrible woman's insults had sullied me with a stain no water can wash away. What sorrows have come upon us since our mother died, Els!"

Her sister nodded, and added mournfully: "Our father, my Wolff, your poor, stricken heart, and below in the Council chamber, Eva, perhaps whilst we are talking, those who are soon to be my kindred are being doomed. That is harder to bear, child, than the invectives with which a wicked woman slanders us. Often I do not know myself where I get the strength to keep up my courage."

She turned away as she spoke to wipe the tears from her eyes without being seen; but Eva perceived it, and rose to clasp her in her arms and whisper words of cheer. Ere she had taken the first step, however, she started; in rising she had upset the clerk's tin water-pail, which fell rattling on the floor.

"The water!" she exclaimed sadly, "and my tongue is parched."

"I'll fetch more," said Els consolingly; "Herr Martin brought it from over yonder."

Opening the door to which she had pointed, she entered a low, spacious anteroom, in which was a brass fire engine, ladders, pails, and various other utensils for extinguishing a fire in the building, hung on the rough plastered wall which separated this room from the office of the city clerk. The centre of the opposite wall was occupied by two small windows surmounted by a broad, semicircular arch, and separated by a short Roman pillar. The sashes of both, whose leaden casings were filled with little round horn panes, stood wide open. This double window was in the upper part of the Council chamber, which occupied two stories. To create a draught this hot day it had been flung wide open, and Els could distinguish plainly the words uttered below. The first that reached her was the name "Wolff Eysvogel."

A burning sensation thrilled her. If she went nearer to the window she could hear what the Honourables decided concerning the Eysvogel house; and, overpowered by her ardent desire not to lose a single word of the discussion which was to determine the happiness of Wolff's life, and therefore hers, she instantly silenced the voice which admonished her that listening was wrong. Yet the habit of caring for Eva was so dear to her,

and ruled her with such power, that before listening to what was passing in the Council chamber below she looked for the water, which she speedily found, took it to the thirsty girl, and hurriedly told her what she had discovered in the next room and how she intended to profit by it.

In spite of Eva's entreaty not to do it, she hastened back to the open window.

The younger sister, though she shook her head, gazed after her with a significant smile.

To Eva this was no accident.

Perhaps it was her saint herself who, when her sister went to seek refreshment for her, had guided her to the window. Eva deemed it a boon to be permitted to find here in solitude the rest needful for her body which, though usually so strong, had been shaken by horror, and to struggle and pray for a clear understanding of the many things which troubled her; for to her prayer was far more than the petition for a spiritual or earthly blessing; nay, she prayed far less frequently to implore anything than from yearning for the Most High to whose presence the wings of prayer raised her. So long as she was absorbed in it, she felt removed from the world and borne into the abode of God.

Now also, whilst Els was listening, she brought no earthly matter to the Power who guided the universe as well as her own little individual life, but merely lost herself in supplication and in her

intercourse with the Omnipotent One, who seemed to her a familiar friend; she forgot what grieved and troubled her and how she had been pained. But meanwhile the prediction she had made to the abbess was verified; she felt as if her lover's soul rose with hers to the pure height where she dwelt, and that the earthly love which filled her heart and his was but an effluence of the Eternal Love, whose embodiment to her was God and the Saviour.

The union of herself and Heinz seemed imaged by two streams flowing from the same great inexhaustible, pure, and beneficent fountain, which, after having run through separate channels, meet to traverse as a single river the blooming meadows and keep them fresh and green. God's love, her own, and his were each separate and yet the same, portions of the great fount which animated, saved, and blessed her, him, and the whole vast universe. The spring gushing from her love and his was eternal, and therefore neither could be exhausted, no matter how much it gave.

But both were still in the world. As he would certainly put forth all his might to show himself worthy of the confidence placed in him by his Emperor and master, she too must test her youthful strength in the arduous conflict which she had begun. Her recent experiences were the flames of the forge fire of life of which her mother had spoken—and how pitifully she had endured their glow! This must be changed. She had

often proved that when the body is wearied the soul gains greater power to soar. Should she not begin to avail herself of this to make her feeble body obey her will? With compressed lips and clenched hand she resolved to try.

CHAPTER IX.

WHILST Eva, completely absorbed in herself, was forming this resolution, Els, panting for breath, stood at the open window under the ceiling of the Council chamber, gazing down and listening to the sounds from beneath.

Directly opposite to her was the inscription:

"Feldt Urtel auf erden, als ir dort woldt geurtheilt werden," *

in the German and Latin languages, and below this motto, urging the magistrates to justice, was a large fresco representing the unjust judge Sisamnes being flayed by an executioner in the costume of the Nuremberg Leben,† before the eyes of King Cambyses, in order to cover the judgment seat with his skin. Another picture represented this lofty throne, on which sat the ruler of Persia dispensing justice. The subject of a third was the Roman army interrupted in its march by the order of the Emperor Trajan, that he might have time to hear

* Judicium quale facis, taliter judicaberis.

† Executioner's assistant. Really "Löwen."

a widow's accusation of the murderer of her son and to punish the criminal.

Els did not bestow a single glance upon these familiar pictures, but gazed down at the thirteen elderly and the same number of much younger men, who in their high-backed chairs were holding council together at her left hand far below her. These were the burgomasters of the city, of whom an elder and a younger one directed for the space of a month, as "Questioner," the government of the public affairs of the city and the business of the "Honourable Council."

At this time the office was filled by Albert Ebner and Jörg Stromer, whilst in the secret council formed by seven of the older gentlemen, as the highest executive authority, Hans Schürstab as the second and Berthold Vorchtel as first Losunger filled the chief offices.

So this year the deeply offended father held the highest place in the Council, and in the whole community of Nuremberg he, more than any one else, would decide the fate of the Eysvogels.

Els knew this, and with an anxious heart saw him gaze earnestly and sadly at the papers which Martin Schedel, the city clerk, had just brought to him from a special desk. At his side, in the centre of the table covered with green cloth, sat the listener's uncle, the magistrate Berthold Pfinzing, who in the Emperor's name presided over the court of justice.

He also appeared in his character of protector of the Jews, and Samuel Pfefferkorn, a Hebrew usurer, had just left the hall after an examination.

Casper Eysvogel was gazing after him with a face white as death. His handsome head shook as the imperial magistrate, turning to Berthold Vorchtel, the chief Losunger, said in a tone loud enough to be heard by all present, "So this is also settled. Herr Casper contracted the great debt to the Jew without the knowledge of his son and partner, and this explains to a florin the difference between the accounts of the father and son. The young man was intentionally kept in the dark about the greatest danger which threatened the business. To him the situation of the house must have appeared critical, but by no means hopeless. But for the Siebenburgs and the other bandits, who transformed the last important and promising venture of the firm into a great loss, and with the sale of the landed property, it might perhaps have speedily risen, and under prudent and skilful management regained its former prosperity. The enormous sum to which the debt to Samuel Pfefferkorn increased gives the position of affairs a different aspect. Since, as protector of the Jew, I must insist upon the payment of this capital with the usual interest, the old Eysvogel firm will be unable to meet its obligations—nay, its creditors can be but partially paid. Therefore nothing remains for us to do

save to consider how to protect as far as possible our city and the citizens who are interested. Yet, in my opinion, the entire firm does not deserve punishment—only the father, who concealed from his upright son his own accounts and those of Samuel Pfefferkorn, and—it is hard for me to say this in Herr Casper's presence;—also, when the peril became urgent, illegally deprived his business partner of the possibility of obtaining a correct view of the real situation of affairs. So, in the Emperor's name, let justice take its course."

These words pronounced the doom of the ancient, great, and wealthy Eysvogel firm; yet the heart of Els throbbed high with joy when, after a brief interchange of opinions between the assembled members of the Council, the imperial magistrate, turning to Herr Vorchtel, again began: "As Chief Losunger, it would be your place, Herr Berthold, to raise your voice on the part of the Honourable Council in defence of the accused; but since we are all aware of the great grief inflicted upon you by the son of the man in whose favour you would be obliged to speak, we should, I think, spare you this duty, and transfer it to Herr Hans Schürstab, the second Losunger, or to Herr Albert Ebner, the oldest of the governing burgomasters, who, though equally concerned in this sad case, are less closely connected with the Eysvogels themselves."

Els uttered a sigh of relief, for both the men

named were friendly to Wolff; but Herr Vorchtel had already risen and began to speak, turning his wise old head slowly to and fro, and drawing his soft grey beard through his hand.

He commenced his address as quietly as if he were talking with friends at his own table, and the tones of his deep voice, as well as the expression of his finely moulded aged features, exerted a soothing influence upon his listeners.

Els, with a throbbing heart, felt that nothing which this man advocated could be wrong, and that whatever he recommended would be sure of acceptance; for he stood amongst his young and elderly fellow directors of the Nuremberg republic like an immovably steadfast guardian of duty and law, who had grown grey in the atmosphere of honesty and honour. Thus she had imagined the faithful Eckart, thus her own Wolff might look some day when age had bleached his hair and labour and anxiety had lined his lofty brow with wrinkles; Berthold Vorchtel, and other "Honourables" who resembled him; grey-haired Conrad Gross; tall, broad-shouldered Friedrich Holzschuher, whose long, snow-white hair fell in thick waves to his shoulders; Ulrich Haller, in whose locks threads of silver were just appearing, princely in form and bearing; stately Hermann Waldstromer, who had the keen eyes of a huntsman; the noble Ebner brothers, who would have attracted attention even in an assembly of knights and counts—nay, the Em-

peror Rudolph was probably thinking of the men below when he said that the Nuremberg Council reminded him of a German oak wood, where firm reliance could be placed on every noble trunk.

Herr Berthold Vorchtel was just such a noble, reliable tree. Els told herself so, and though she knew how deeply he was wounded when Wolff preferred her to his daughter Ursula, and how sorely he mourned his son Ulrich's death, she was nevertheless convinced that this man would bear the Eysvogels no grudge for the grief suffered through them, for no word which was not just and estimable would cross his aged lips.

She was not mistaken; for after Herr Berthold had insisted upon his right to raise his voice, not in behalf of Herr Casper but for his business firm and its preservation, he remarked, by way of introduction, that for the sake of Nuremberg he would advise that the Eysvogel house should not be abandoned without ceremony to the storm which its chief had aroused against the ancient, solid structure.

Then he turned to the papers and parchments, to which the city clerk had just added several books and rolls. His address, frequently interrupted by references to the documents before him, sounded clear and positive. The amount of the sums owed by the Eysvogel firm, as well as the names of its creditors in Nuremberg, Augsburg, Ulm, and Regensburg, Venice, Milan, Bruges, and

other German and foreign cities, formed the most important portion of his speech. During its progress he frequently seized a bit of chalk and blackboard, writing rapidly on the green table whole rows of figures, and the young burgomasters especially exchanged admiring smiles as the experienced old merchant added and subtracted in an instant sums for which they themselves would have needed twice as much time.

The figures and names buzzed in the ears of the listener at the window like the humming of a swarm of gnats. To understand and remember them was impossible, and she gazed in astonishment at the old man who so clearly comprehended the confused tangle and drew from it so readily just what he needed for his purpose.

When he closed, and with a loud "Therefore" began to communicate the result, she summoned all the mental power she possessed in order to understand it. She succeeded, but her knees fairly trembled when she heard the sum which the house was obliged to repay to others.

Yet, when Herr Berthold lastly gave the estimate of the Eysvogel property in merchandise, buildings, and estates, she was again surprised. She had not supposed that Wolff's proud family was so wealthy; but the close of this report brought fresh disappointment, for including the sum which Herr Casper had borrowed from the Jew Pfefferkorn, the debts of the firm exceeded its possessions

far more than Els had expected from the amount of its riches.

She was wholly ignorant of the condition of her own father's property; but she thought she knew that it was far from being enough to suffice here. And this appeared to be the case, for when Berthold Vorchtel resumed his speech he alluded to Ernst Ortlieb. In words full of sympathy he lamented the unprecedented insult which had led him to commit the deed of violence that prevented his sharing in this consultation. But before his removal he had given him an important commission. Upon certain conditions—but *only* upon them—he would place a considerable portion of his fortune at his disposal for the settlement of this affair. Still, large as was the promised sum, it would by no means be sufficient to save the Eysvogel business from ruin. Yet he, Berthold Vorchtel, was of the opinion that its fall must be prevented at any cost. The sincerity of this conviction he intended to prove by the best means at a merchant's command—the pledge of his own large capital.

These words deeply moved the whole assembly, and Els saw her uncle glance at the old gentleman with a look which expressed the warm appreciation of a man of the same mind.

Casper Eysvogel, who, lost in thought, had permitted the statements of the Losunger, which were mingled with many a bitter censure of his own conduct, to pass without contradiction—nay,

apparently in a state of apathy in which he was no longer capable of following details—straightened his bowed figure and gazed enquiringly into Herr Berthold's face as if he did not venture to trust his own ears; but the other looked past him, as he added that what he was doing for the Eysvogel business was due to no consideration for the man who had hitherto directed it, or his family, but solely on account of the good city whose business affairs the confidence of the Council had summoned him to direct, and her commerce, whose prosperity was equally dear to most of the Honourables around him.

Cries and gestures of assent accompanied the last sentence; but Berthold Vorchtel recognised the demonstration by remarking that it showed him that the Council, in the name of the city, would be disposed to do its share in raising the amount still lacking.

This statement elicited opposition, expressed in several quarters in low tones, and from one seat loudly, and Herr Berthold heard it. Turning to Peter Ammon, one of the Eysvogels' principal creditors, who was making the most animated resistance, he remarked that no one could be more unwilling than himself to use the means of the community to protect from the consequences of his conduct a citizen whose own errors had placed him in a perilous position, but, on the other hand, he would always—and in this case with special

zeal—be ready to aid such a person in spite of the faults committed, if he believed that he could thus protect the community from serious injury.

Then he asked permission to make a digression, and being greeted with cries of "Go on!" from all sides, began in brief, clear sentences to show how the commerce of Nuremberg from small beginnings had reached its present prosperity. Instead of the timid, irregular exchange of goods as far as the Rhine, the Main, and the Danube, regular intercourse with Venice, Milan, Genoa, Bohemia, and Hungary, Flanders, Brabant, and the coast of the Baltic had commenced. Trade with the Italian cities, and through them, even with the Levant, had made its first successful opening under the Hohenstaufen rule; but during the evil days when the foreign monarchs had neglected Germany and her welfare, it sustained the most serious losses. By the election of Rudolph of Hapsburg who, with vigour, good-will, and intelligence, had devoted his attention to the security of commerce in the countries over which he reigned, better days for the merchant had returned, and it was very evident what his work required, what injured and robbed it of its well-earned reward. Confidence at home and abroad was the foundation of prosperity, not alone of the Nuremberg merchant but of trade in general. Under the Hohenstaufen rule their upright ancestors had so strengthened this confidence that wherever he went the Nuremberg merchant re-

ceived respect and confidence above many—perhaps all others. The insecurity of the roads and of justice in the lawless times before the election of the Hapsburgs might have impaired this great blessing; but since Rudolph had wielded the sceptre with virile energy, made commerce secure, and administered justice, confidence had also returned, and to maintain it no sacrifice should be too great. As for him, Berthold Vorchtel, he would not spare himself, and if he expected the city to imitate him he would know how to answer for it.

Here he was interrupted by loud shouts of applause; but, without heeding them, he quietly went on: "And it is necessary to secure confidence in the Nuremberg merchant in two directions: his honesty and the capital at his command. Our business friends, far and near, must be permitted to continue to rely upon our trustworthiness as firmly as upon rock and iron. If we brought the arrogant Italian to say of us that, amongst the German cities who were blind, Nuremberg was the one-eyed, we ought now to force them to number us amongst those who see with both eyes, the honest, trust-inspiring blue eyes of the German. But to attain this goal we need the imperial protection, the watchful power of a great and friendly ruler. The progress which our trade owed to the Hohenstaufen proves this; the years without an Emperor, on the contrary, showed what threatens

our commerce as soon as we lack this aid. Rights and privileges from sovereigns smoothed the paths in which we have surpassed others. To obtain new and more important ones must be our object. From the first Reichstag which the Emperor Rudolph held here, he has shown that he esteems us and believes us worthy of his confidence. Many valuable privileges have revealed this. To maintain this confidence, which is and will remain the source of the most important favours to Nuremberg, is enjoined upon us merchants by prudence, upon us directors of the city by regard for its prosperity. But, my honourable friends, reluctantly as I do so, I must nevertheless remind you that this confidence, here and there, has already received a shock through the errors of individuals. Who could have forgotten the tale of the beautiful cap of the unhappy Meister Mertein, who has preceded us into the other world? Doubtless it concerned but one scabby sheep, yet it served to bring the whole flock into disrepute. Perhaps the fact that it occurred so soon after Rudolph's election to the sovereignty, during the early days of his residence in our goodly city, imprinted it so deeply upon our imperial master's memory. A few hours ago he asked for some information concerning the sad affair which now occupies our attention, and when I represented that the public spirit and honesty of my countrymen, fellow-citizens, and associate members of the Council would prevent it from in-

juring our trade at home or abroad, he alluded to that story, by no means in the jesting way with which he formerly mentioned the vexatious incident that redounded to the honour of no one more than that of his own shrewdness, which at that time—seven years ago—was so often blended with mirth."

When the speaker began to allude to this much-discussed incident a smile had flitted over the features of his listeners, for they remembered it perfectly, and the story of Emperor Rudolph and the cap was still related to the honour of the presence of mind of the wise Hapsburg judge.

During the period of the assembly of the princes a Nuremberg citizen had taken charge of a bag containing two hundred florins for a foreign merchant who had lodged with him, but when he was asked for the property entrusted to him denied that he had received it.

This disgraceful occurrence was reported to the Emperor, but he apparently paid no heed to it, and received Master Mertein, amongst other citizens who wished to be presented to him. The dishonest man appeared in a rich gala dress and as, embarrassed by the Emperor's piercing gaze, he awkwardly twirled his cap—a magnificent article bordered with costly fur; the sovereign took it from his hand, examined it admiringly and, with the remark that it would suit even a king, placed it on his own royal head. Then he approached one after another

to exchange a few words and, as if forgetting that he wore the head-gear, left the apartment to order a messenger to take the cap at once to its owner's wife, show it to her as a guarantee of trustworthiness, and ask her to bring the bag which the foreign merchant had given him to the castle. The woman did so and the cheat was unmasked.

Everyone present, like Els, was familiar with this story, which wrongly cast so evil a light upon the uprightness of the citizens of Nuremberg. Who could fail to be painfully affected by the thought that Rudolph, during his present stay amongst them, must witness the injury of others by a Nuremberg merchant? Who could have now opposed Herr Berthold, when he asked, still more earnestly than before, that the community would do its share to maintain confidence in the reliability of the Nuremberg citizens, and especially of the Honourable Council and everyone of its members?

But when he mentioned the large sum which he himself, and the other which Ernst Ortlieb intended on certain conditions to devote to the settlement of this affair, Peter Ammon also withdrew his opposition. The First Losunger's proposal was unanimously accepted, and also the condition made by his associate, Ernst Ortlieb. Casper Eysvogel, on whom the resolution bore most heavily, submitted in silence, shrugging his shoulders.

How high Els's heart throbbed, how she longed

to rush down into the Council chamber and clasp the hand of the noble old man at the green table, when he said that in consequence of Ernst Ortlieb's condition—which he also made—the charge of the newly established Eysvogel business must be transferred from Herr Casper's hands to those of his son, Herr Wolff, as soon as the imperial pardon permitted him to leave his hiding-place. He, Berthold Vorchtel, would make no complaint against him, for he knew that Wolff had been forced to cross swords with his Ulrich. He had formed this resolution after a severe struggle with himself; but as a Christian and a fair-minded man he had renounced the human desire for revenge, and as God had wished to give him a token of his approval, he had sent to his house a substitute for his dead son. Fresh cries of approval interrupted this communication, whose meaning Els did not understand.

Not a word of remonstrance was uttered when the imperial magistrate at last proposed that Casper Eysvogel and the women of his family should leave the city and atone for his great offence by ten years in exile. One of his estates, which he advised the city to buy, could be assigned him as a residence. Herr Casper's daughter, Frau Isabella Siebenburg, had already, with her twin sons, found shelter at the Knight Heideck's castle. Her husband, who had joined his guilty brothers, would speedily fall into the hands of justice and reap what he had sowed. For the final settlement of this

affair he begged the Honourable Council to appoint commissioners, whom he would willingly join.

Then Herr Vorchtel again rose and requested his honourable friends to treat the new head of the house with entire confidence; for from the books of the firm and the statements which he had made in his hiding-place and sent to the Council, both he and the city clerk had become convinced that he was one of the most cautious and upright young merchants in Nuremberg. Their opinion was also shared by the most prominent business acquaintances of the house.

This pleased the listener. But whilst the speaker sat down amidst the eager assent of his associates in office, and Herr Casper Eysvogel, leaning on the arm of his cousin, Conrad Teufel, left the hall with tottering steps, utterly crushed, she saw the city clerk Schedel, after a hasty glance upwards, approach the side door, through which he could reach the staircase leading to his rooms.

He evidently intended to tell the result of the discussion. But the old gentleman would need considerable time to reach her, so she again listened to what was passing below.

She heard her uncle, the magistrate, speak of her father's unfortunate deed, and tell the Council how the name of Herr Ernst's daughters, who were held in such honour, had become innocently, through evil gossip, the talk of the people. Just at

that moment the old man's shuffling step sounded close by the door.

Els stopped listening to hasten towards the messenger of good tidings, and the old gentleman could scarcely believe his own eyes when he saw the happiness beaming in the girl's beautiful fresh face, whose anxiety and pallor had just roused his deep sympathy.

It was scarcely possible that anyone could have anticipated him with the glad news, and spite of his seventy-two years the city clerk had retained the keen eyes of youth. When he entered the anteroom with Els and saw the open window and beside it the white Riese which she had removed in order to hear better, he released himself from the arm she had passed around his shoulders, shook his finger threateningly at her, and cried: "It's fortunate that I find only the Riese, and not the listener, otherwise I should be compelled to deliver her to the jailer, or even the torturer, for unwarranted intrusion into the secrets of the Honourable Council. I can hardly institute proceedings against a bit of linen!"

CHAPTER X.

A FEW minutes later the sisters left the Town Hall. Their white Rieses were wound so closely about their faces that their features were completely hidden, but the thin material permitted them to see Herr Vorchtel, leaning upon the arm of the young burgomaster, Hans Nutzel, leave the Council chamber, where the other Honourables were still deliberating. Pointing to the old man, the city clerk told Els with a significant smile that Ursula Vorchtel was engaged to the talented, attractive young merchant now walking with her father, and that he had promised Herr Vorchtel to aid him and his younger son in the management of his extensive business. This was a great pleasure to the noble old merchant, and when he, the city clerk, met Ursula that morning, spite of her deep mourning, she again looked out upon the world like the happy young creature she was. Her new joy had greatly increased her beauty, and her lover was the very person to maintain it. Herr Schedel thought it would be pleasant news to Els, too.

The young girl pressed his hand warmly; for

these good tidings put the finishing touch to the glad tidings she had just heard. The reproach which, unjust as it might be, had spoiled many an hour for Wolff and entailed such fatal consequences, was now removed, and to her also "Ursel's" altered manner had often seemed like a silent accusation. She felt grateful, as if it were a personal joy, for the knowledge that the girl who had believed herself deserted by Wolff, her own lover, was now a happy betrothed bride.

Ursula's engagement removed a burden from Eva's soul, too, only she did not understand how a girl whose heart had once opened to a great love could ever belong to anyone else. Els understood her; nay, in Ursula's place she would have done the same, if it were only to weave a fresh flower in her afflicted father's fading garland of joy.

The city clerk accompanied them to the great entrance door of the Town Hall.

Several jailers and soldiers in the employ of the city were standing there, and whilst their old friend was promising to do his utmost to secure Ernst Ortlieb's liberation and recommending the girls to the protection of one of the watchmen, Eva's cheeks flushed; for a messenger of the Council had just approached the others, and she heard him utter the name of Sir Heinz Schorlin and his follower Walther Biberli. Els listened, too, but whilst her sister in embarrassment pressed

her hand upon her heart, she frankly asked the city clerk what had befallen the knight and his squire, who was betrothed to her maid. She heard that at the last meeting of the Council an order had been issued for Biberli's arrest.

His name must have been brought up during the discussions of the slanders which had so infamously pursued the Ortlieb sisters, but she could not enquire how or in what connection, for the sun was already low in the western sky, and if the girls wished to see their father there was no time to lose.

Yet, though Kätterle had just said that Countess von Montfort was waiting outside in her great sedan-chair for the young ladies, they were still detained, for they would not leave the Town Hall without thanking the city clerk and saying farewell to him. He was still near, but the captain of the city soldiers had drawn him aside and was telling him something which seemed to permit no delay, and induced the old gentleman to glance at the sisters repeatedly.

Eva did not notice it; for Biberli's arrest, which probably had some connection with Heinz and herself, had awakened a series of anxious thoughts associated with her lover and his faithful follower. Els troubled herself only about the events occurring in her immediate vicinity, and felt perfectly sure that the captain's communications referred not only to the four itinerant workmen and the

three women who had just been led across the courtyard to the "Hole," and to whom the speaker pointed several times, but especially to her and her sister.

When the city clerk at last turned to them again, he remarked carelessly that a disagreeable mob in front of the Ortlieb mansion had been dispersed, and then, with urgent cordiality, invited the two girls to spend the night under the protection of his old housekeeper. When they declined, he assured them that measures would be taken to guard them from every insult. He had something to tell their uncle, and the communication appeared to permit no delay, for with a haste very unusual in the deliberate old gentleman he left the two sisters with a brief farewell.

Meanwhile Countess Cordula had become weary of waiting in the sedan-chair. She came striding to meet her new friends, attired in a rustling canary-green silk robe whose train swept the ground, but it was raised so high in front that the brown hunting-boots encasing her well-formed feet were distinctly visible. She was swinging her heavy riding-whip in her hand, and her favourite dogs, two black dachshunds with yellow spots over their eyes, followed at her heels.

As it was against the rules to bring dogs into the Town Hall, the doorkeeper tried to stop her, but without paying the slightest attention to him, she took Els by the hand, beckoned to Eva, and

was turning to leave the path leading to the market-place.

In doing so her eyes fell upon the courtyard, where, just after the *Ave Maria*, a motley throng had gathered. Here, guarded by jailers, stood vagabonds and disreputable men and women, sham blind beggars and cripples, swindlers, and other tatterdemalions, who had been caught in illegal practices or without the beggar's sign. In another spot, dark-robed servants of the Council were discussing official and other matters. Near the "Hole" a little party of soldiers were resting, passing from hand to hand the jug of wine bestowed by the Honourable Council. The "Red Coat" * was giving orders to his "Life," † as they carried across the courtyard a new instrument of torture intended for the room adjoining the Council chamber, where those who refused to make depositions were forced to it. In a shady corner sat old people, poorly clad women, and pale-faced children, the city poor, who at this hour received food from the kitchen of the Town Hall. A few priests and monks were going into the wing of the building which contained the "Hole," with its various cells and the largest chamber of torture, to give the consolations of religion to the prisoners and those tortured by the rack who

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* Executioner.

† Executioner's assistant ("Lion").

had not yet been conveyed to the hospital at Schweinau.

The countess's keen glance wandered from one to another. When they reached the group of paupers they rested upon a woman with deadly pale, hollow cheeks, pressing a pitifully emaciated infant to her dry breast, and her eyes swiftly filled with tears.

"Here," she whispered to old Martsche, taking several gold coins from the pocket that hung at her belt, "give these to the poorest ones. You are sensible. Divide it so that several will have a share and the money will reach the right hands. You can take your time. We need neither you nor Kätterle. Go back to the house. I will carry your young mistresses to their father and home again. Where I am you need have no fear that harm will befall them.

Then she turned again towards the "Hole," and seeing the people yelling and shouting while awaiting imprisonment, she pointed to them with her whip, saying, "That's a part of the pack which was set upon you. You shall hear about it presently. But now come."

As she spoke she went before the girls and urged them to step quickly into the large, handsome sedan-chair, around which an unusual number of people had assembled, for she wished to avoid any recognition of the sisters by the curious spectators. The gilded box, borne between two

powerful Brabant horses in such a way that it hung between the tail of the first and the head of the second, would have had room for a fourth occupant.

When it moved forward, swaying from side to side, Cordula pointed to the curtained windows, and said: "Shameful, isn't it? But it is better so, children. That arch rascal Siebenburg robbed the people of the little sense they possessed, and that cat of a candle-dealer, with her mate, the tailor, or rather his followers, poisoned the minds of the rest. How quickly it worked! Goodness, it seems to me, acts more slowly. True, your hot-tempered father spoiled the old rascal's inclination to woo pretty Metz for a while; but his male and female gossips, aunts, cousins, and workpeople apparently allowed themselves to be persuaded by his future mother-in-law to the abominable deed, which caused the brawling rabble you saw in the Town Hall court to content themselves with a hard couch in the 'Hole' overnight."

"They have done everything bad concerning us, though I don't know exactly what," cried Els indignantly.

"Wished to do, Miss Wisdom," replied the countess, patting Els's arm soothingly. "We kept our eyes open, and I helped to put a stop to their proceedings. The rabble gathered in front of your house, yelling and shrieking, and when I stepped into your bow-window there was as great

an outcry as if they were trying to bring down the walls of Jericho a second time. Some boys even flung at me everything they could find in the mire of the streets. The most delightful articles! There was actually a dead rat! I can see its tail flying now! Our village lads know how to aim better. Before the worst came, by the advice of the equerry and our wise chaplain, whom I consulted, we had done what was necessary, and summoned the guard at the Frauenthor to our assistance. But the soldiers were in no great haste; so when matters were going too far, I stepped into the breach myself, called down to tell them my name, and also showed my cross-bow with an arrow on the string. This had an effect. Only a few women still continued to load me with horrible abuse. Then the chaplain came to the window and this restored silence; but, in spite of his earnest words, not a soul stirred from the spot until the patrol arrived, dispersed the rabble, and arrested some of them."

Els, who sat by Cordula's side, drew her towards her and kissed her gratefully; but Eva's eyes had filled with tears of grief at the beginning of the countess's report of this new insult, and the hostility of so many of the townsfolk; yet she succeeded in controlling herself. She would not weep. She had even forced herself to gaze, without the quiver of an eyelash, at the sorrowful and horrible spectacle outside of the "Hole." She

must cease being a weak child. How true her dying mother's words had been! To be able to struggle and conquer, she must not withdraw from life and its influences, which, if she did not spare herself, promised to transform her into the resolute woman she desired to become.

She had listened with labouring breath to the speaker's last words, and when Els embraced Cordula, she raised her little clenched hand, exclaiming with passionate emotion: "Oh, if I had only been at home with you! You are brave, Countess, but I, too, would not have shrunk from them. I would voluntarily have made myself the target for their malice, and called to their faces that only miserably deluded people or shameless rascals could throw stones at my Els, who is a thousand times better than any of them!"

"Or at you, you dear, brave child," added Cordula in an agitated tone.

From the day following the burning of the convent the countess had given up her whim of winning Heinz Schorlin. She now knew that all her nobler feelings spoke more loudly in favour of the quiet man who had borne her out of the flames. Sir Boemund Altrosen's love had proved genuine, and she would reward him for it; but the heart of the pretty creature opposite to her was also filled with deep, true love, and she would do everything in her power for Eva, whom she had

loved ever since her affliction had touched her tender heart.

Both sisters were now aware of Cordula's kind intentions, and the warm pleasure she displayed when Els told her what the Council had determined, showed plainly enough that the motherless young countess, who had neither brother nor sister, clung to the daughters of her host like a third sister. Old Herr Vorchtel's treatment of the man who had inflicted so deep a sorrow upon him touched her inmost soul. It was grand, noble; the Saviour himself would have rejoiced over it. "If it would only please the good old man," she exclaimed, "I would rather offer him my lips to kiss than the handsomest young knight."

Though two of Count von Montfort's mounted huntsmen and several constables accompanied the unusually large and handsome sedan-chair, a curious crowd had followed it; but the opinion probably prevailed that the countess's companions were some of her waiting-women. When they alighted in front of the watch-tower, however, an elderly laundry-maid who had worked for the Ortliebs recognised the sisters and pointed them out to the others, protesting that it was hard for a woman of her chaste spirit to have served in a house where such things could have happened. Then a tailor's apprentice, who considered the whole of the guild insulted in the wounded Meister Seubolt, put his fingers to his wide mouth and

emitted a long, shrill whistle; but the next instant a blow from a powerful fist silenced him. It was young Ortel, who had come to the watch-tower to seek Herr Ernst and tell him that he and his sister Metz, spite of their mother and guardian, meant to stay in his service. His heart's blood would not have been too dear to guard Eva, whom he instantly recognised, from every insult; but he had no occasion to use his youthful strength a second time, for the soldiers who guarded the tower and the city mercenaries drove back the crowd and kept the square in front of the tower open.

The countess would not be detained long, for the sun had already sunk behind the towers and western wall of the fortress, and the reflection of the sunset was tinging the eastern sky with a roseate hue. The warden really ought to have refused them admittance, for the time during which he was permitted to take visitors to the imprisoned "Honourable" had already passed. But for the daughters of Herr Ernst Ortlieb, to whom he was greatly indebted, he closed his eyes to this fact, and only entreated them to make their stay brief, for the drawbridge leading to the tower must be raised when darkness gathered.

The young girls found their father, absorbed in grief as if utterly crushed, seated at a table on which stood a leaden inkstand with several sheets of paper. He still held the pen in his hand.

He received his daughters with the exclamation,

"You poor, poor children!" But when Els tried to tell him what had given her so much pleasure, he interrupted her to accuse himself, with deep sorrow, of having again permitted sudden passion to master him. Probably this was the last time; such experiences would cool even the hottest blood. Then he began to relate what had induced him to raise his hand against the tailor, and as, in doing so, he recalled the insolent hypocrite's spiteful manner, he again flew into so violent a rage that the blow which he dealt the table made the ink splash up and soil both the paper lying beside it and his own dress, still faultlessly neat even in prison. This caused fresh wrath, and he furiously crushed the topmost sheet, already half covered with writing, and hurled it on the floor.

Not until Els stooped to pick it up did he calm himself, saying, with a shrug of the shoulders, "Who can remain unmoved when the whirlwind of despair seizes him? When a swarm of hornets attacks a horse, and it rears, who wonders? And I—— What stings and blows has Fate spared me?"

Els ventured to speak soothingly to him, and remind him of God, and the saints to whom he had made such generous offerings in building the convent; but this awakened an association, and he asked if it were true that Eva had refused to take the veil.

She made a silent gesture of assent, expecting another outburst of anger; but her father only

shook his head sorrowfully, clasped her right hand in both his, and said sadly: "Poor, poor child! But she, she—your mother—would probably—— The last words her dear lips bestowed upon us concerned you, child, and I believe their meaning——"

Here the warden interrupted him to remind the girls that it was time to depart; but whilst Els was begging the man for a brief delay, Herr Ernst looked first at the paper and writing materials, then at his daughters, and added with quiet decision: "Before you go, you must hear that, in spite of everything, I did not wholly lose courage, but began to act."

"That is right, dear father," exclaimed Els, and told him briefly and quickly what the Council had decided, how warmly old Berthold Vorchtel had interceded for Wolff, and that the management of the business was to be confided solely to him.

These tidings swiftly and powerfully revived the fading hopes of the sorely stricken man. He drew up his short figure as if the vigour of youth had returned, declaring that he now felt sure that this first star in the dark night would soon be followed by others. "It will now be your Wolff's opportunity," he exclaimed, "to make amends for much that Fate—— But I was commencing something else. Give me that bit of crumpled paper. I'll look at it again early to-morrow morning; it is a letter to the Emperor I was composing. Your

brother ought not to have given up his young life on the battlefield for the Crown in vain. He owes me compensation for the son, you for the brother. He is certainly a fair-minded man, and therefore will not shut his ears to my complaint. Just wait, children! And you, my devout Eva, pray to your saint that the petition, which concerns you also, may effect what I expect."

"And what is that?" asked Eva anxiously.

"That the wrong done you, you poor, deceived child, shall be made good," replied Herr Ernst with imperious decision.

Eva clasped his hand, pleading warmly and tenderly: "By all that you hold dear and sacred, I beseech you, father, not to mention me and Sir Heinz Schorlin in your letter. If he withdrew his love from me, no imperial decree——"

The veins on the Councillor's brow again swelled with wrath, and though he did not burst into a passion, he exclaimed in violent excitement: "A nobleman who declares his love to a chaste Nuremberg maiden of noble birth assumes thereby a duty which, if unfulfilled, imposes a severe punishment upon him. This just punishment, at least, the tempter shall not escape. The Emperor, who proclaimed peace throughout the land and cleared the highways of the bands of robbers, will consider it his first duty——"

Here the warden interrupted him by calling from the threshold of the room that the draw-

bridge would be raised and the young ladies must follow him without delay.

Eva again besought her father not to enter an accusation against the knight, and Els warmly supported her sister; but their brief, ardent entreaty produced no effect upon the obstinate man except, after he had pressed a farewell kiss upon the brows of both, to tell them with resolute dignity that the night would bring counsel, and he was quite sure that this time, as usual, he should pursue the right course for the real good of his dear children.

Hitherto Herr Ernst had indeed proved himself a faithful and prudent head of his family, but this time his daughters left him with heavy, anxious hearts.

Fear of her father's intention tortured Eva like a new misfortune, and Els and the countess also hoped that the petition would go without the accusation against Heinz.

Whilst the sedan-chair was bearing the girls home few words were exchanged. Not until they approached the Frauenthor did they enter into a more animated conversation, which referred principally to Biberli and the question whether the Honourable Council would call Kätterle to account also, and what could be done to save both from severe punishment. Cordula had drawn aside the curtain on the right and was gazing into the street, apparently from curiosity, but really with great anxiety. But Herr Pfinzing had done his part, and

with the exception of several soldiers in the pay of the city there were few people in sight near the Ortlieb mansion.

A horse was being led up and down on the opposite side of the courtyard, and behind the chains stood a sedan-chair with several men, to whom Metz had just brought from the kitchen a coal of fire to light their torches. The pretty girl looked as bright as if she felt small concern for the severe wound of the grey-haired tailor who had chosen her for his wife.

CHAPTER XI.

As the young girls were getting out of their sedan-chair, the Frauenthor, which was closed at nightfall, opened to admit another whose destination also seemed to be the Ortlieb mansion.

Kätterle was standing in the lower entry with her apron raised to her face. She had learned that her true and steadfast lover had been carried to the "Hole," and was waiting here for her mistresses and also for Herr Pfinzing and his wife, whom old Martsche had conducted to the sitting-room in the second story. Herr Pfinzing, in her opinion, had as much power as the Emperor, and his wife was famed all over the city for her charitable and active kindness. When the noble couple came down Kätterle meant to throw herself on her knees at their feet and beseech them to have mercy on her betrothed husband. The sisters and Cordula comforted her with the promise that they would commend Biberli's cause to the magistrate; but as they went upstairs they again expressed to one another the fear that Kätterle herself would sooner or later follow the man she loved to prison.

They found Herr Pfinzing and his wife in the sitting-room.

Kätterle was not wrong in expecting kindly help from this lady, for a more benevolent face than hers could scarcely be imagined, and, moreover, Frau Christine certainly did not lack strength to do what she deemed right. Though not quite so broad as her short, extremely corpulent husband, she surpassed him in height by several inches, and time had transformed the pretty, slender, modest girl into a majestic woman. The slight arch of the nose, the lofty brow, the light down on the upper lip, and the deep voice even gave her a somewhat imperious aspect. Had it not been for the kind, faithful eyes, and an extremely pleasant expression about the mouth, one might have wondered how she could succeed in inspiring everyone at the first glance with confidence in her helpful kindness of heart.

Her grey pug had also been brought with her. How could an animal supply the place of beloved human beings? Yet the pug had become necessary to her since her son, like so many other young men who belonged to patrician Nuremberg families, had fallen in the battle of Marchfield, and her daughter had accompanied her husband to his home in Augsburg. The onerous duties of her husband's office compelled him to leave her alone a great deal, and even in her extremely active life there were lonely hours when she needed a

living creature that was faithfully devoted to her.

She was often overburdened with work, for every charitable institution sought her as a "fosterer." True, in many cases their request was vain. Whatever she undertook must be faultlessly executed, and the charge of the orphan children in the city, the Beguines, and the hospital at her summer residence occupied her sufficiently. During the winter she lived with her husband at his official quarters in the castle, but as soon as spring came she longed for her little manor at Schweinau; for she had taken into the institution erected there for the widows of noble crusaders, but in which only the last four of these ladies were now supported, a number of Beguines. These were godly girls and women who did not wish to submit to convent rules, or did not possess the favour or the money required for admission.

Without pledging themselves to celibacy or any of the other restrictions imposed upon the nuns, they desired only, in association with others of the same mind, to lead a life pleasing in the sight of God and devoted to Christian charity. Schweinau afforded abundant opportunity for charitable women to aid suffering fellow-mortals, since it was here that the unfortunates who had been mutilated by the hands of the executioner and his assistants, or wounded on the rack, often nearly unto death, were brought to be bandaged, and as far as pos-

sible healed. The Beguines occupied themselves in nursing them, but had many a conflict with the spiritual authorities, who preferred the monks and nuns bound by a monastic vow. The order of St. Francis alone regarded them with favour, interceded for them, and watched over them with kindly interest, taking care that they were kept aloof from everything which would expose them to reproach or blame.

Frau Christine, the Abbess Kunigunde's sister, aided her in this effort, and the Beguines, to whom the magistrate's wife in no way belonged, but who had given them a home on her own estate, silently rendered her obedience when she wished to see undesirable conditions in their common life removed.

Els, as well as Eva, had long since told Frau Christine, who was equally dear to both, everything that afforded ground for the shameful calumnies which had now urged their father to a deed for which he was atoning in prison.

When, a few hours before, a messenger from her husband informed her of what had occurred, she had instantly come to the city to see that the right thing was done, and take the girls thus bereft of their father from the desolate Ortlieb mansion to her own house. Herr Pfinzing had warmly approved this plan, and accompanied her to the "Es," as he, too, was fond of calling his nieces.

When she had been told what motives induced Eva not to confide herself just now to the protection of the convent, Frau Christine struck her broad hips, exclaiming, "There's something in blood! The young creature acts as if her old aunt had thought for her."

Her invitation sounded so loving and cordial, her husband pressed it with such winning, jovial urgency, and the pug Amicus, whose attachment to Eva was especially noticeable, supported his mistress's wish with such ardent zeal, that she called the sisters' attention to his intercession.

Meanwhile the girls had already expressed to each other, with the mute language of the eyes, their inclination to accept the invitation so affectionately extended. Els only made the condition that they were not to go to Schweinau until early the following morning, after their visit to their father; Eva, on the other hand, desired to go as soon as possible, gladly and gratefully confessing to her aunt how much more calmly she would face the future now that she was permitted to be under her protection.

"Just creep under the old hen's wings, my little chicken; she will keep you warm," said the kind-hearted woman, kissing Eva. But, as she began to plan for the removal of the sisters, more visitors were announced—indeed, several at once; first, Albert Ebner, of the Council, and his wife, then Frau Clara Löffelholz, who came without her

husband, and the two daughters of the imperial ranger Waldstromer, Els's most intimate friends. They had come in from the forest-house the day before to attend Frau Maria Ortlieb's burial. Now, with their mother's permission, they came to invite the deserted girls to the forest. The others also begged the sisters to come to them, and so did Councillors Schürstab, Behaim, Gross, Holzschuher, and Pirckheimer, who came, some with their wives and some singly, to look after the daughters of their imprisoned colleague.

The great sitting-room was filled with guests, and the stalwart figures and shrewd, resolute faces of the men, the kind, good, and usually pleasing countenances of the women, whose blue eyes beamed with philanthropic benevolence, though they carried their heads high enough, afforded a delightful spectacle, and one well calculated to inspire respect. There could be no doubt that those whose locks were already grey represented distinguished business houses and were accustomed to manage great enterprises. There was not a single one whom the title "Honour of the Family" could not have well befitted; and what cheerful self-possession echoed in the deep voices of the men, what maternal kindness in those of the elder women, most of whom also spoke in sonorous tones!

Els and Eva often cast stolen glances at each other as they greeted the visitors, thanked them,

answered questions, gave explanations, accepted apologies, received and courteously declined invitations. They did not comprehend what had produced this sudden change of feeling in so many of their equals in rank, what had brought them in such numbers at so late an hour, as if the slightest delay was an offence, to their quiet house, which that very day had seemed to Frau Vorkler too evil to permit her children to remain in its service.

The old magistrate and his wife, on the contrary, thought that they knew. They had helped the sisters to receive the first callers; but when Frau Barbara Behaim, a cousin of the late Frau Maria, had appeared, they gave up their post to her, and slipped quietly into the next room to escape the throng.

There they retired to the niche formed by the deep walls of the broad central window of the house, and Herr Berthold Pfinzing whispered to his wife: "There was too much philanthropy and kindness for me in there. A great deal of honey at once cloys me. But you, prophetess, foresaw what is now occurring, and I, too, scarcely expected anything different. So long as one still has a doublet left compassion is in no haste, but when the last shirt is stripped from the body charity—thank the saints!—moves faster. We are most ready to help those who, we feel very sure, are suffering more than they deserve. There are many motherless children; but young girls who

have lost both parents, exposed to every injustice——"

"Are certainly rare birds," his wife interrupted, "and this will undoubtedly be of service to the children. But if they are now invited to the houses of the same worthy folk who, a few hours ago, thought themselves too good to attend the funeral of their admirable mother, and anxiously kept their own little daughters away from them, they probably owe it especially to the right mediators, noble old Vorchtel and another."

"To-day, if ever, certainly furnished evidence how heavily the testimony and example of a really estimable man weighs on the scale. The First Losunger interceded for the children as if they were his own daughters, attacked the slanderers, and of course I didn't leave him in the lurch."

"Peter Holzschuher declared that you defended them like the Roman Cicero," cried Frau Christine merrily. "But don't be vexed, dear husband; no matter how heavily the influence of the two Bertholds—Vorchtel's and yours—weighed in the balance, nay, had that of a third and a fourth of the best Councillors been added, what is now taking place before our eyes and ears would not have happened, if——"

"Well?" asked the magistrate eagerly.

"If," replied the matron in a tone of the firmest conviction, "they had not all been far from believing, even for a moment, in their inmost souls the

shameful calumny which baseness dared to cast upon those two—just look more closely."

"Yet if that was really the case——" her husband began to object, but she eagerly continued: "Many did not utter their better knowledge or faith because the evil heart believes in wickedness rather than virtue, especially if their own house contains something—we will say a young daughter—whose shining purity is thereby brought into a clearer light. Besides, we ourselves have often been vexed by—let us do honour to the truth!—by the defiant manner in which your devout godchild—yonder 'little saint'—held aloof in her spiritual arrogance from the companions of her own age——"

"And then," the corpulent husband added, "two young girls cannot be called 'the beautiful Es' unpunished in houses which contain a less comely T, S, and H. Just think of the Katerpecks. There—thank the saints!—they are taking leave already."

"Don't say anything about them!" said Frau Christine, shaking her finger threateningly. "They are good, well-behaved children. It was pretty Ermengarde Muffel yonder by the fireplace who, after the dance at the Town Hall, assailed your godchild most spitefully with her sharp tongue. My friend Frau Nützel heard her."

"Ah, that dance!" said the magistrate, sighing faintly. "But the child was certainly distinguished in no common way. The Emperor Rudolph himself looked after her as if an angel had appeared

to him. You yourself heard his sister's opinion of her. Her husband, the old Burgrave, and his son, handsome Eitelfritz—— But you know all that. Half would have been enough to stir ill-will in many a heart."

"And to turn her pretty little head completely," added his wife.

"That, by our Lady, Christine," protested the magistrate, "that, at least, did not happen. It ran off from her like water from an oil jar. I noticed it myself, and the abbess——"

"Your sister," interrupted the matron thoughtfully, "she was the very one who led her into the path that is not suited for her."

"No, no," the magistrate eagerly asserted. "God did not create a girl, the mere sight of whom charms so many, to withdraw her from the gaze of the world."

"Husband! husband!" exclaimed Frau Christine, tapping his arm gaily. "But there go the Schürstabs and Ebners. What a noise there is in the street below!"

Her husband looked out of the bow window, pointed down, and asked her to come and stand beside him. When she had risen he passed his arm around the slenderest part of her waist, which, however, he could not quite clasp, and eagerly continued: "Just look! One would think it was a banquet or a dance. The whole street is filled with sedan-chairs, servants, and torch-bearers. A

few hours ago the constables had hard work to prevent the deluded people from destroying the house of the profligate Es, and now one half of the distinguished honourable Councillors come to pay their homage. Do you know, dear, what pleases me most in all this?"

"Well?" asked Frau Christine, turning her face towards him with a look of eager enquiry, which showed that she expected to hear something good. But he nodded slightly, and answered:

"We members of patrician families cling to old customs; each wants to keep his individuality, as he would share or exchange his escutcheon with no one. Then, when one surpasses the rest in external things, whatever name they may bear, no one hastens to imitate him. We men are independent, rugged fellows. But if the heart and mind of any one of us are bent upon something really good and which may be said to be pleasing in the sight of God, and he successfully executes it, then, Christine, then—I have noticed it in a hundred instances —then the rest rush after him like sheep after the bellwether."

"And this time you, and the other Berthold, were the leaders," cried Frau Christine, hastily pressing a kiss upon her old husband's cheek behind the curtain.

Then she turned back into the dusky chamber, pointed to the open door of the sitting-room, and said, "Just look! If that isn't—— There comes

Ursula Vorchtel with her betrothed husband, young Hans Nützel! What a fine-looking man the slender youth has become! Ursel—her visit is probably the greatest pleasure which Els has had during this blessed hour."

The wise woman was right; for when Ursel held out her hands to her former friend, whom she had studiously avoided so long, the eyes of both girls were moist, and Els's cheeks alternately flushed and paled, like the play of light and shadow on the ground upon a sunny morning in a leafy wood when the wind sways the tree tops.

What did they not have to say to each other! As soon as they were unnoticed a moment Ursel kissed her newly regained friend, and whispered, pointing to her lover, with whom Frau Barbara Behaim was talking: "He first taught me to know what true love is, and since then I have realised that it was wrong and foolish for me to be angry with you, my dear Els, and that Wolff did right to keep his troth, hard as his family made it for him to do so. Had my Hans met me a little sooner, we should not now have to mourn our poor Ulrich. I know—for I have tried often enough to soothe his resentment—how greatly he incensed your lover. Oh, how sad it all is! But your aunt, the abbess, was right when she told us before our confirmation, 'When the cross that is imposed upon us weighs too heavily, an angel often comes, lifts it, and twines it with lovely roses!' That has been

my experience, dear Els; and what great injustice I did you when I kept out of your way so meanly! I always felt drawn to you. But when that evil gossip began I turned against them all and bade them be silent in my presence, for it was all false, base lies. I upheld your Eva, too, as well as you, though she had been very ungracious whenever we met."

How joyously Els opened her heart to these confessions! How warmly she interceded for her sister! The girls had passed their arms around each other, as if they had returned to the days of their childhood, and when Ursel's lover glanced at his betrothed bride, who, spite of her well-formed figure and pleasant face, could not be classed amongst the most beautiful of women, he thought she might compare in attractiveness with the loveliest maidens, but no one could equal her in kindness of heart. She saw this in the warm, loving look with which he sought her pleasant grey eyes, as he approached to remind her that it was time to go; but beckoning to him, she begged him to wait just a moment longer, which she employed in whispering to Els: "You should find shelter with us, and no one else, if my father—— Don't think he refused to let me invite you on account of poor Ulrich, or because he was angry with you. It's only because—— After the session to-day they all praised his noble heart, and I don't know what else, so loudly and with such exaggeration that it

was too much to believe. If he interceded for the Eysvogel firm and you poor children, it was only because, as a just man, he could not do otherwise."

"Oh, Ursel!" Els here interrupted, wishing to join in her father's praise; but the latter would not listen and eagerly continued:

"No, no, he really felt so. His modesty made him unwilling to awaken the belief that he asked the betrothed bride of the man—you understand—and her sister into his house, to set an example of Christian reconciliation. False praise, he says, weighs more heavily than disgrace. He has already heard more of it than he likes, and therefore, for no other reason, he does not open his house to you, but upon his counsel and his aid, he bids me tell you, you can confidently rely."

Then the friends took leave of each other, and Ursula also embraced Eva, who approached her with expressions of warm gratitude, kissed her, and said, as she went away, "When next we meet, Miss Ungracious, I hope we shall no longer turn our backs on each other."

When Ursel had gone with her lover, and most of the others had followed, Els felt so elated by thankfulness that she did not understand how her heart, burdened with such great and heavy anxieties, could be capable of rising to such rapturous delight.

How gladly she would have hastened to Wolff to give him his share of this feeling! But, even had

not new claims constantly pressed upon her, she could on no account have sought his hiding-place at this hour.

When the last guest and the abbess also had retired, Aunt Christine asked Els to pack whatever she and her sister needed for the removal to Schweinau, for Eva was to go there with her at once.

Countess Cordula, who, much as she regretted the necessity of being separated from her companions, saw that they were right to abandon the house from which their father had been torn, wanted to help Els, but just as the two girls were leaving the room a new visitor arrived—Casper Teufel, of the Council, a cousin of Casper Eysvogel, who had leaned on his arm for support when he left the session that afternoon.

Els would not have waited for any other guest, but this one, as his first words revealed, came from the family to which she felt that she belonged, and the troubled face of the grey-haired, childless widower, who was usually one of the most jovial of men, as well as the unusually late hour of his call, indicated so serious a reason for his coming that she stopped, and with anxious urgency asked what news he had brought.

It was not unexpected, yet his brief report fell heavily on the heart of Els, which had just ventured to beat gaily and lightly.

Her uncle and aunt, Eva and the countess, also listened to the story.

He had accompanied Casper Eysvogel to his home and remained with him whilst, overflowing with resentment and vehement, unbridled complaints of the injustice and despotism to which—owing specially to the hostility and self-conceit of old Berthold Vorchtel—he had fallen a victim, he informed Frau Rosalinde and her mother what the Council had determined concerning his own future and that of his family.

When he finally reported that he himself and the ladies must leave the house and the city, Countess Rotterbach, with a scornful glance at her deeply humiliated son-in-law, exclaimed, "This is what comes of throwing one's self away!" The unfortunate man, already shaken to the inmost depths of his being, sank on his knees.

Conrad Teufel had instantly placed him in bed and sent for the leech; but even after they had bathed his head with cold water and bled him he did not regain consciousness. His left side seemed completely paralysed, and his tongue could barely lisp a few unintelligible words.

At the leech's desire a Sister of Charity had been sent for. Isabella Siebenburg, the sufferer's daughter, had already gone with her twin sons, in obedience to her husband's wish, to Heideck Castle.

She had departed in anger, because she had

vainly endeavoured to induce her mother and grandmother, who opposed her, to speak more kindly of her husband. When they disparaged the absent man with cruel harshness, she felt—she had told her cousin so—as if the infants could understand the insult offered to their father, and, to protect the children even more than herself, from her husband's feminine foes, she left the falling house, in spite of the entreaties and burning tears with which, in the hour of parting, her mother strove to detain her.

Ere her departure she gave her jewels and the silver which her grandfather had bequeathed to her to Conrad Teufel, to satisfy the most urgent demands of her husband's creditors. Her father and she had parted kindly, and he made no attempt to oppose her.

No one except the Sister of Charity was now in attendance upon the old gentleman; for his wife wept and wailed without finding strength to do anything, and even reproached her own mother, whom she accused of having plunged them all into misfortune, and caused the stroke of paralysis from which her husband was suffering.

The grey-haired countess, the cousin went on, had passed from one attack of convulsions into another, and when he approached her had shrieked the words "ingratitude" and "base reward" so shrilly at him, in various tones, that they were still ringing in his ears.

Everything in the luckless household was out of gear, and its noble guest, the Duke von Gülich, would feel the consequences, for the servants had lost their wits too. Spite of the countless men and maids, he had been obliged to go himself to the pump to get a glass of water for the sick man, and the fragments of the vase which the grandmother had flung at him with her own noble hand were still lying on the floor. His name was Teufel,* but even in his home in Hades things could scarcely be worse.

When Herr Teufel at last paused, the magistrate and his wife exchanged a significant glance, while Eva gazed with deep suspense, and Cordula with earnest pity, at Els, who had listened to the story fairly panting for breath.

When she raised her tearful eyes to Herr Pfinzing and Frau Christine, saying mournfully, "I must beg you to excuse me, my dear aunt and uncle; you have heard how much my Wolff's father needs me," all saw their expectations fulfilled.

"Hard, hard!" said the magistrate, patting her on the shoulder. "Yet the lead with which we burden ourselves from kindly intentions becomes wood, or at last even feathers."

But Frau Christine was not content with uttering cheering words; she offered to accompany Els

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* Devil.

and secure the place to which she was entitled. Frau Rosalinde had formerly often visited the matron to seek counsel, and had shown her, with embarrassing plainness, how willingly she admitted her superior ability. She disliked the old countess —but with whom would not the self-reliant woman, conscious of her good intentions, have dared to cope? Since the daughter of the house had left her relatives, the place beside his father's sick-bed belonged to the son's future wife. Frau Rosalinde was weak, but not the worst of women. "Just wait, child," Aunt Christine concluded, "she will see soon enough what a blessing enters the house and the sick-room with you. We will try to erect a wall against the old woman's spite."

Conrad Teufel confessed that he had come with the hope of inducing Els, who had nursed her own mother so skilfully and patiently, to make so praiseworthy a resolution. In taking leave he promised to keep a sharp lookout for her rights, and, if necessary, to show the old she-devil his own cloven foot.

After he, too, had gone, the preparations for the sisters' departure were commenced. Whilst Cordula was helping Eva to select the articles she wished to take to Schweinau, and her older sister, with Kätterle's assistance, was packing the few pieces of clothing she needed as a nurse in the Eysvogel family, the countess offered to visit Herr Ernst in the watch-tower early the follow-

ing morning and tell him what detained his daughters. Towards evening Eva could come into the city under the protection of her aunt, who had many claims upon her the next day, and see the prisoner.

This time, to the surprise of her sister, who had always relieved her of such cares, Eva herself did the packing. When she had finished she led the weeping Kätterle to her uncle, that she might beg for mercy upon her lover.

The magistrate was thoroughly aware of the course of affairs, and talked to the maid with the gentle manner, pervaded with genuine kindness of heart, which was one of his characteristics. Biberli had already been subjected to an examination by torture; but even on the rack he had not said one word about his betrothed bride, and had resolutely denied everything which could criminate his master. A second trial awaited him on the morrow, but the magistrate promised to do all in his power to obtain the mildest possible sentence for him. At any rate, like all whose blood was shed by a legal sentence, he would be sent to Schweinau to be cured, and as Kätterle would accompany Eva there, she could find an opportunity of nursing her betrothed husband herself.

With these words he dismissed the girl, but when again alone with his wife he admitted to her that the poor fellow might easily fare badly—nay, might even lose his tongue—if on the rack,

which was one of the instruments of torture to which he must again be subjected, he confessed having forced his way into the house of an "Honourable" at night. True, the fact that in doing so he had only followed his master, would mitigate the offence. He must bind the judges to secrecy, should it prove impossible to avoid the necessity of informing them of Eva's somnambulism. If the sentence were very severe, he might perhaps be able to delay its execution. Sir Heinz Schorlin, who stood high in the Emperor's favour, would then be asked to apply to the sovereign to annul it, or at any rate to impose a lighter punishment.

Here he was interrupted by his nieces and Cordula, and soon after Frau Christine went out with Els to go to the Eysvogels. Herr Pfinzing remained with the others.

A personage of no less distinction than the Duchess Agnes had complained to him of the reckless countess. Only yesterday she had ridden into the forest with her father, and when the young Bohemian princess met her, Cordula's dogs had assailed her skittish Arabian so furiously that it would have been difficult for a less practised rider to keep her seat in the saddle. This time the docile animals had refused to obey their mistress, and the duchess expressed the suspicion that she had not intended to call them off; for, though she had carelessly apologised, she asked,

as if the words were a gibe, if there was anything more delightful than to curb a refractory steed. She had an answer ready for Cordula, however, and retorted that the disobedience of her dogs proved that, if she understood how to obtain from horses what she called the greatest delight, she certainly failed in the case of other living creatures. She therefore offered her royal condolence on the subject.

Then she remarked to the magistrate that the incident had occurred in the imperial forest where, as she understood, the unrestricted wandering of strange hunting dogs was prohibited. Therefore, in future, Countess von Montfort might be required to leave hers at home when she rode to the woods.

The magistrate now brought the complaint to the person against whom it was made, adopting a merry jesting tone, in which Cordula gaily joined.

When the old gentleman asked whether she had previously angered the irritable princess, she answered laughing, "The saints have hitherto denied to the wife of the Emperor's son, as well as to other girls of thirteen or fourteen, the blessing of children, so she likes to play with dolls. She chanced to prefer the same one for which she saw me stretch out my hands."

The old magistrate vainly sought to understand this jest; but Eva knew whom the countess

meant by the doll, and it grieved her to see two women hostile to each other, seeking to amuse themselves with one who bore so little resemblance to a toy, and to whom she looked up with all the earnestness of a soul kindled by the deepest passion.

While the magistrate and the countess were gaily arguing and jesting together she sat silent, and the others did not disturb her.

After a long time Frau Christine returned. Traces of tears were plainly visible, though she had tried, whilst in the sedan-chair, to efface them. The scenes which Els had experienced at the Eysvogels' had certainly been far worse than she had feared—nay, the old countess's attack upon her was so insulting, Frau Rosalinde's helpless grief and Herr Casper's condition were so pitiable, that she had thought seriously of bringing the poor girl back with her, and removing her from these people who, she was sure, would make Els's life a torment as soon as she herself had gone.

The grandmother's enquiry whether Jungfrau Ortlieb expected to find her Swiss gallant there, and similar insolent remarks, seemed fairly steeped with rancour.

What a repulsive spectacle the old woman, utterly bereft of dignity, presented as with solemn mockery she courtesied to Els again and again, as if announcing herself her most humble servant; but the poor child kept silence until Frau Christine

herself spoke, and assigned her niece to the place beside Herr Casper's sick-bed, which no one else could fill so well.

Stillness reigned in this chamber, and Els scarcely had occasion to dread much disturbance, for the countess had been strictly forbidden to enter the sufferer's room. Frau Rosalinde seemed to fear the sight of the helpless man, and the Sister of Charity was a strong, resolute woman, who welcomed Els with sincere cordiality, and promised Frau Christine to let no evil befall her.

The sedan-chairs were already waiting outside, and the lady would have gladly deferred her account of these sorrowful events until later, but Cordula so affectionately desired to learn how her friend had fared in her lover's home, that she hurriedly and swiftly gratified her wish. Speaking of the matter relieved her heart, and in a somewhat calmer mood she was carried to Schweinau.

CHAPTER XII.

THE little Pfinzing castle in Schweinau was neither spacious nor splendid, but it was Frau Christine's favourite place of abode.

The heat of summer found no entrance through the walls—three feet in thickness—of the ancient building. Early in the morning and at evening it was pleasant to stay in the arbour, a room open in the front, extending the whole length of the edifice, where one could breathe the fresh air even during rainy weather. It overlooked the herb garden, which was specially dear to its mistress, for it contained roses, lilies, pinks, and other flowers; and part of the beds, after being dug by the gardener, who had charge of the kitchen garden in the rear, were planted and tended by her own hand.

The hour between sunrise and mass was devoted to this work, in which Eva was to help her, and it would afford her much information; for her aunt raised many plants which possessed healing power. Some of the seeds or bulbs had been

brought from foreign lands, but she was perfectly familiar with the virtues of all. Schweinau afforded abundant opportunity to use them, and the nurses in the city hospital, and the leech Otto, and other physicians, as well as many noble dames in the neighbourhood who took the place of a physician among their peasants and dependents, applied to Frau Christine when they needed certain roots, leaves, berries, and seeds for their sick. Nor did the monks and nuns, far and near, ever come to her for such things in vain.

True, the life at Castle Schweinau was by no means so quiet as the one which Eva had hitherto loved.

When she accepted the invitation she knew that, if she shared all her aunt's occupations, she would not have even a single half hour of her own; but this was not her first visit here, and she had learned that Frau Christine allowed her entire liberty, and required nothing which she did not offer of her own free will.

When she saw the matron, after the mass and the early repast which her husband shared with her before going to the city, visit the aged widows of the crusaders in the little institution behind the kitchen garden and inspect and regulate the work of the Beguines, she often wondered where this woman, whose age was nearer seventy than sixty, found strength for all this, as well as the duties which followed. First there were orders to give

in the kitchen that the principal meal, after the vesper bells had rung, should always win from the master of the house the "Couldn't be better," which his wife heard with the same pleasure as ever. Then, after visiting the wash-house, the bleachery, the linen presses, the cellar, the garret, and even the beehives to see that everything was in order, and emerging from the hands of the maid as a well-dressed noblewoman, she received visit after visit. Members of the patrician families of Nuremberg arrived; monks and nuns on various errands for their cloisters and their poor; gentlemen and ladies from ecclesiastical and secular circles, in both city and country, among them frequently the most aristocratic attendants of the Reichstag; for she numbered the Burgrave and his wife among her friends, and when questioned about the Nuremberg women, the Burgrave Frederick mentioned her as second to none in ability, shrewdness, and kindness of heart.

Both he and his worthy wife sometimes sought her in the sphere of occupation which consumed the lion's share of her time and strength—the superintendence of the Schweinau hospital. True, she often let days elapse without entering it; but if anything went wrong and her assistance was desirable or necessary in serious cases, she remained there until late at night, or even until the following morning.

At such times even the most distinguished

visitors were sent home with the message that Frau Christine could not leave the sick.

The Burgrave and his wife were the only persons permitted to follow her into the hospital, and they had probably gained the privilege of speaking to her there because they were among its most liberal supporters, and three of their sons wore the cross of the Knights Hospitaller, and often spent weeks there, as the rule of the order prescribed, in nursing the sufferers.

Women also had the right to enter the hospital to be cured of the wounds inflicted by the scourge or the iron of the executioner.

Each sufferer was to be nursed there only three days, but Frau Christine took care that no one to whom such treatment might be harmful should be put out. The Honourable Council was obliged, willing or unwilling, to defray the necessary expense. The magistrate had many a battle to fight for these encroachments, but he always found a goodly majority on the side of the hospital and his wife. If the number of those who required longer nursing increased too rapidly they did not spare their own fine residence.

The hospital and the hope of being allowed to help within its walls had brought Eva to Schweinau. The experiences of the past few days had swept through the peace of her young soul like a tempest, overthrowing firmly built structures and fan-

ning glimmering sparks to flames. Since her quiet self-examination in the room of the city clerk, she had known what she lacked and what duty required her to become. The bond which united her to her saint and the Saviour still remained, but she knew what was commanded by him from whom St. Clare's mission also came, what Francis of Assisi had enjoined upon his followers whose experiences had been like hers.

They were to strive to restore peace to their perturbed souls by faithful toil for their brothers and sisters; and what toil better suited a feeble girl like herself than the alleviation of her unhappy neighbour's suffering? The harder the duties imposed upon her in the service of love, the better. She would set to work in the hope of making herself the true, resolute woman which her mother, with the eyes of the soul, had seen her fragile child become; but she could imagine nothing more difficult than the tasks to be fulfilled here. This was the real fierce heat of the forge fire to which the dead woman had wished to entrust her purification and transformation. She would not shun, but hasten to it. While her lover was wielding the sword she, too, had a battle to fight. She had heard from Biberli that Heinz wished to undergo the most severe trials. This was noble, and her enthusiastic nature, aspiring to the loftiest goal, was filled with the same desire. Eager to learn how they would bear the test, she scanned her

young shoulders and gazed at the burden which she intended to lay upon them.

When, the year before, her aunt took her to the hospital for the first time, she had returned home completely unnerved. She had not even had the slightest suspicion that there was such suffering on earth, such pain amongst those near her, such depravity amongst those of her own sex. What comparison was there between what Els had done for her gentle, patient mother, or what she would do for old Herr Casper, who lay in a soft bed—it had been shown to her as something of rare beauty, of ebony and ivory—and the task of nursing these infamous gallows-birds bleeding from severe wounds, and these depraved sick women? But if God's own Son gave up His life amidst the most cruel suffering for sinful humanity, how dared she, the weak, erring, slandered girl, who had no goodness save her passionate desire to do what was right, shrink from helping the most pitiable of her neighbours? Here in the hospital at Schweinau lay the heavy burden which she wished to take upon herself.

She desired it also in order to maintain the bond which had united her to the Saviour. She would be constantly reminded here of his own words, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me." To become a bride of Jesus Christ and, closely united to Him in her inmost soul, await the

hour when He would open His divine arms to her, had seemed the fairest lot in life. Now she had pledged herself in the world to another, and yet she did not wish to give up her Saviour. She desired to show Him that though she neither could nor would resign her earthly lover, her heart still throbbed for the divine One as tenderly as of yore. And could He who was Love incarnate condemn her, when He saw how, without even being permitted to hope that her lover would find his way back to her, she clung with inviolable steadfastness to her troth, though no one save He and His heavenly Father had witnessed her silent vow?

She belonged to Heinz, and he—she knew it—to her. Even though later, after all the world had acknowledged her innocence, the walls of convent and monastery divided them, their souls would remain indissolubly united. If there should be no meeting for them here below, in the other world the Saviour would lead them to each other the more surely, the more obediently they strove to fulfil His divine command. As Heinz desired to take up the cross in imitation of Christ she, too, would bear it. It was to be found beside the straw pallets of the wounded criminals. The fulfilment of every hard duty which she voluntarily performed seemed like a step that brought her nearer to the Saviour, and at the same time to the union with her lover, even though in another world.

The first request she made to her aunt on the way to mass, early in the morning of the first day of her stay in Schweinau, was an entreaty for permission to work in the hospital. It was granted, but not until the eyes of the experienced woman, ever prompt in decision, had rested with anxious hesitation upon the beautiful face and exquisite lithe young figure. The thought that it would be a pity for such lovely, pure, stainless girlish charms to be used in the service of these outcasts had almost determined her to utter a resolute "No"; but she did not do it; nay, a flush of shame crimsoned her face as her eyes rested on the image of the crucified Redeemer which stood beside the road leading to the little village church; for whom had He, the Most High, summoned to His service and deemed specially worthy of the kingdom of heaven? The simple-hearted, the children, the adulterers, the sinners and publicans, the despised, and the poor! No, no, it would not degrade the lovely child to help the miserable creatures yonder, any more than it did the rarest plant which she raised in her herb garden when she used it to heal the hurts of some abandoned wretch.

And besides, with what deep loathing she herself had gone to the hospital at first, and how fully conscious of her own infinite superiority she had returned from amongst these depraved beings to the outdoor air.

Yet how this feeling, which had stirred within her heart, gradually changed!

During her closer acquaintance with the poor and the despised, the nature and work of Christ first became perfectly intelligible to her; for how many traits of simple, self-sacrificing readiness to help, what touching contentment and grateful joy in the veriest trifle, what childlike piety and humble resignation even amidst intolerable suffering, these unfortunates had shown! Nay, when she had become familiar with the lives of many of her *protegées* and learned how they had fallen into the hands of the executioner and reached Schweinau, she had asked herself whether, under similar circumstances, the majority of those who belonged to her own sphere in life would not have found the way there far more speedily, and whether they would have endured the punishment inflicted half so patiently or with so much freedom from bitterness and rebellion against the decrees of the Most High. She had discovered salutary sap in many a human plant that had at first seemed absolutely poisonous; where she had shrunk from touching such impurity, violets and lilies had bloomed amidst the mire. Instead of holding her head haughtily erect, she had often left the hospital with a sense of shame, and it was long since she had ceased to use the proud privilege of her rank to despise people of lower degree. If sometimes tempted to exercise it, the impulse was roused far

more frequently by those of her own station, who were base in mind and heart, than by the sufferers in the hospital.

She had become very modest in regard to herself, why should she wake to new life the arrogance now hushed in Eva's breast?

Much secret distress of mind and anguish of soul had been endured by the poor child, who yesterday had opened her whole heart to her, when she went to rest in her chamber. How lowly she felt, how humble was the little saint who recently had elevated herself above others only too quickly and willingly! It would do her good to descend to the lowest ranks and measure her own better fate by their misery. She who felt bereaved could always be the giver in the hospital, and she felt with subtle sympathy what attracted Eva to her sufferers.

The magistrate's wife was a religious matron, devoted to her Church, but in her youth she had been by no means fanatical. The Abbess Kunigunde, her younger sister, however, had fought before her eyes the conflict of the soul, which had finally sent the beautiful, much-admired girl within convent walls. No one except her quiet, silent sister Christine had been permitted to witness the mental struggle, and the latter now saw repeated in her young niece what Kunigunde had experienced so many years before. Difficult as it had then been for her to understand the future abbess,

now, after watching many a similar contest in others, it was easy to follow every emotion in Eva's soul.

During a long and happy married life, in which year by year mutual respect had increased, the magistrate and his wife had finally attained the point of holding the same opinions on important questions; but when Herr Berthold returned from the city, and finding Eva already at the hospital, told his wife, at the meal which she shared with him, that from his point of view she ought to have strenuously opposed her niece's desire, and he only hoped that her compliance might entail no disastrous consequences upon the excitable, sensitive child, the remarkable thing happened that Frau Christine, without as usual being influenced by him, insisted upon her own conviction.

So it happened that this time the magistrate was robbed of the little nap which usually followed the meal, and yet, in spite of the best will to yield, he could not do his wife the favour of allowing himself to be convinced. Still, he did not ask her to retract the consent which she had once given, so Eva was permitted to continue to visit the hospital.

The nurse, a woman of estimable character and strong will, would faithfully protect her whatever might happen. Frau Christine had placed the girl under her special charge, and the Beguine Hildegard, a woman of noble birth and the widow of a

knight who had yielded his life in Italy for the Emperor Frederick, received her with special warmth because she had a daughter whom, just at Eva's age, death had snatched from her.

Yet the magistrate would not be soothed. Not until he saw from the arbour, whilst the dessert still remained on the table, Cordula riding up on horseback did he cease recapitulating his numerous objections and go to meet the countess.

To his straightforward mind and calm feelings the most incomprehensible thing had been Frau Christine's description of the soul-life of her sister and her niece. He knew the terrible impressions which even a man could not escape amongst the rabble in the hospital, and had used the comparison that what awaited Eva there was like giving a weak child pepper.

As Countess Cordula, aided by the old man's hand, swung herself from the saddle of her spirited dappled steed, he thought: "If it were she who wanted to tend our sick rascals instead of the delicate Eva, I wouldn't object. She'd manage Satan himself whilst my little godchild was holding intercourse with her angels in heaven."

In the arbour Cordula explained why she had not come before; but her account told the elderly couple nothing new.

When she went to see Ernst Ortlieb in the watch-tower that morning he had already been taken to the Town Hall. No special proceedings

were required, since he was his own accuser, and many trustworthy witnesses deposed that he had been most grossly irritated—nay, as his advocate represented, had wounded the tailor in self-defence. Yet Ernst Ortlieb could not be dismissed from imprisonment at once, because the tailor's representative demanded a much larger amount of blood-money than the court was willing to grant. The wound was not dangerous to life, but still prevented his leaving his bed and appearing in person before his judges. The candle-dealer was nursing him in his own house and instigating him to make demands whose extravagance roused the judges' mirth. As after a tedious discussion Meister Seubolt still insisted upon them, the magistrates from the Council and the Chief of Police, who composed the court, advised Herr Ernst to have the sentence deferred and recognise the tailor's claim that his case belonged to the criminal court. Out of consideration for the citizens and the excited state of the whole guild of tailors, it seemed advisable to avoid any appearance of partiality, yet in that case the self-accuser must submit to imprisonment until the sentence was pronounced. This delay, however, was of trivial importance; for Herr Pfinzing had promised his brother-in-law that his cause should be considered and settled on the following day.

Herr Berthold had told his wife all this soon after his return, and added, with much admiration

of the valiant fellow's steadfastness, that Biberli, Sir Heinz Schorlin's servant, had again been subjected to an examination by torture and was racked far more severely than justice could approve.

The countess reported that after her friend's father had been taken back to the watch-tower a few hours before, she had found him in excellent spirits.

True, the Burgrave von Zollern had not come to visit him in person, like many "Honourables" and gentlemen, but he had sent his son Eitelfritz to enquire how he fared, and the prisoner was occupied with the petition which he wished to send the sovereign the next day through Meister Gottlieb von Passau, the Emperor Rudolph's protonotary. He had told Cordula, with a resolute air, that it contained the charge that Sir Heinz Schorlin had found his way into his house at night, and would not even suffer her to finish her entreaty to omit the accusation. "And now," the countess added mournfully, "I urge you, to whom the young girl is dear, to consider the pitiable manner in which, by her own father's folly, Eva's name will be on the tongues of the whole court, and what the gossips throughout the city will say about the poor child in connection with such an accusation."

Frau Pfinzing sighed heavily, and rose, but her husband, who perceived her intention, stopped her with the remark that it would be useless to go that

day, for the sun was already setting and the watch-tower was closed at nightfall.

This induced the matron to return to her seat; but she had scarcely touched the easy-chair ere she again rose and told the servant to saddle the big bay. She would ride to the city on horseback this time; the bearers moved too slowly. Then turning to her husband, she said gaily:

"I thank you for the excuse you have made for me, but I cannot use it in this case. My foolish brother must on no account make the charge which will expose his daughter; it would be a serious misfortune were I to arrive too late. What is the use of being the wife of the imperial magistrate, if a Nuremberg drawbridge cannot be raised for me even after sunset? If the petition has already gone, I must see Meister Gottlieb. True, it was not to be sent until to-morrow, but there is nothing of which we are more glad to rid ourselves than the disagreeable transactions from which we shrink. Give me a pass for the warder, Pfinzing; and you, Countess, excuse me; it is you who send me away."

Whilst the maid brought her headkerchief and her cloak, and the magistrate in a low tone told the servant to have his horse ready, too, Frau Christine asked Cordula to bring Eva from the hospital, if she felt no disgust at the sight of common people suffering from wounds.

The countess answered with a ringing laugh:

"The huts of our wood-cutters, labourers, and fishermen look cleaner, it is true, than the hovels of the charcoal burners and quarrymen in the Montfort forests and mountains; yet none of them are perfumed with sandal-wood and attar of roses, and the blow of the axe which gashes one of our wood-cutter's flesh presents a similar spectacle to the wounds which your criminals bring with them to Schweinau. And let me tell you, I am the leech in Montfort, and unless death is near, and the chaplain accompanies me bearing the sacrament, I often go alone with the manservant, the maid, or the pages who carry my medicines. Since I grew up I have attended to our sick, and I cannot tell you how many fractures, wounds, hurts, and fevers I have cured or seen progress to a fatal end. I stand godmother to nearly all the newborn infants in our villages and hamlets. The mothers whom I nurse insist upon it. There are almost as many Cordulas as girls on the Montfort estates, and in many a hut there are two or three of them. Michel the fisherman has a Cordula, a Cordel, and a Dulla. Therefore it follows that I am accustomed to severe wounds, though my heart often aches at the sight of them. I know how to bandage as well as a barber, and, if necessary, can even use the knife."

"I thought so," cried the magistrate, much comforted. "Set my delicate little Eva an example if her courage fails; or, what would be still

better, if you see that the horrible business goes too much against the grain, persuade her to give up work which requires stronger hands and a less sensitive nature. But there are the horses already. I want to go to the city, too, Christel, and it's lucky that I don't have to go alone at night."

"So said the man who jumped in to save somebody from drowning," replied Frau Christine laughing: "It's lucky it happened, because I was just going to take a bath!" But it pleased her to have her husband's companionship, and she did not approach her horse until he had examined the saddle-girth and the bridle with the utmost care.

Before putting her foot in the stirrup, she told the old housekeeper to take Countess von Montfort to the hospital and commend her to the special care of Sister Hildegard. She would call for Cordula and Eva on her return from the city; but they must not wait for her should the strength of either fail. She had ordered a sedan-chair to be kept ready for her niece at the hospital. A second one would be at the countess's disposal.

"That's what I call foresight!" cried the magistrate laughing. "Only, my dear countess, see that our little saint doesn't attempt anything too hard. Her pious heart would run her little head against the wall if matters came to that and, like the noble Moorish steeds, she would drop dead in her tracks rather than stop. Such a delicate creature is like a lute. When the key is raised

higher and higher the string snaps, and we want to avoid that. With you, my young heroine——"

"There is no danger of that kind," Cordula gaily protested. "This instrument is provided with metal strings; the tone is neither sweet nor musical, but they are durable."

"Good, firm material, such as I like," the magistrate declared. Then he helped his wife mount her horse, placed the bridle in her left hand, looked at the saddle-girth again, and, spite of his corpulence, swung himself nimbly enough on his strong steed. Then, with Frau Christine, he trotted after the torch-bearers towards the city.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE drawbridge before the watch-tower was promptly lowered for the imperial magistrate and his wife. He would have dissuaded Frau Christine from the ride and come alone, had not experience taught him that Ernst Ortlieb was more ready to listen to her than to him. But they came too late; just before sunset Herr Ernst had availed himself of the visit of the imperial forester, Waldstromer, to give him the petition to convey to the protonotary, by whom it was to reach the Emperor. Nor did he regret this decision, but insisted that his duty as a father and a Nuremberg "Honourable" would not permit the wrong done to his child and his household by a foreign knight to pass unpunished.

True, Frau Christine exerted all her powers of persuasion to change his opinion, and her husband valiantly supported her, but they accomplished nothing except to gain the prisoner's consent that if the paper had not yet reached the Emperor the protonotary might defer its presentation until he was asked for it.

Herr Ernst had made this concession after the magistrate's representation that Sir Heinz Schorlin had been subjected to an experience which had stirred the inmost depths of his soul, and soon after had been unexpectedly sent in pursuit of the Siebenburgs. Hence he had found no time to speak to the father. If he persisted in his intention of entering a monastery, the petition would be purposeless. If it proved that he was merely trifling with Eva, there would be time enough to call upon the Emperor to punish him. Besides, he knew from Maier of Silenen that the knight had firmly resolved to renounce the world.

But the magistrate and his wife did not take their nocturnal ride in vain, for after leaving the watch-tower they met the protonotary at St. Sebald's. He had received the petition, but had not yet delivered it to his royal master, and promised to withhold it for a time.

Rejoicing over this success, Herr Pfinzing accompanied Frau Christine, who wanted to visit Els, to the Eysvogel residence.

The din of many voices and loud laughter greeted them from the spacious entry. Three mendicant friars, with overflowing pouches, pressed past them, and two others were still standing with the men and the maidservants assembled in the light of the lanterns. They had filled the barefooted monks' bags, for the salvation of their own souls, with the provisions of the house, and were

talking garrulously, already half intoxicated by the jugs of wine which the butler willingly filled to earn a sweet reward from the young maids, who eagerly sought the favour of the rotund bachelor whose hair was just beginning to turn grey.

The magistrate's entrance startled them, and the butler vainly strove to hide a large jar whose shape betrayed that it came from Sicily and contained the noble vintage of Syracuse. Two of the maids slid under their aprons the big hams and pieces of roast meat with which they had already begun to regale themselves.

Herr Berthold, smiling sadly, watched the conduct of the masterless servants; then raising his cap, bowed with the utmost respect to the disconcerted revellers, and said courteously, "I hope it will agree with you all."

The startled group looked sheepishly at one another. The butler was the only person who quickly regained his composure, came forward to the magistrate cap in hand, and said obsequiously that he and his fellow-servants were in evil case. The house had no master. No one knew from whom he or she was to receive orders. Most of them had been discharged by the Honourable Councillor, but no one knew when he was to leave or whom to ask for his wages.

The magistrate then informed them that Herr Wolff Eysvogel had the right to give orders, and

during his absence his betrothed bride, Jungfrau Els Ortlieb. The next morning a member of the Council would examine the claims of each, pay the wages, and with Frau Rosalinde and Jungfrau Els determine the other matters.

The butler had imbibed a goodly share of the noble wine. His fat cheeks glowed, and at the magistrate's last remark he laughed softly: "If we wait for the folk upstairs to agree we shall stay here till the Pegnitz flows up the valley. Just listen to their state of harmony, sir!"

In fact the shrill, angry accents of a woman's loud voice, with which mingled deeper tones that were very familiar to Herr Berthold, echoed down into the entry. It certainly looked ill for the concord of the women of the house; yet the magistrate could not permit the unprincipled servant's insolence to pass unpunished, so he answered quietly: "You are right, fellow. One can put a stop to this shameful conduct more quickly than several, and by virtue of my office I will therefore be the one to command here. You will leave this house and service to-morrow."

But when the angry butler, with the hoarse tones of a drunkard, declared that in Nuremberg none save rascals were turned out of doors directly after a discharge, the magistrate, with grave dignity, cut him short by remarking that he would do better not to bring before the magistrates the question of what beseemed the servant who wasted

the valuable property entrusted to his care, as had been done here.

With these words he pointed to the spot where the jug of wine which he had plainly seen was only half concealed, and the threat silenced the man, whose conscience reproached him far more than Herr Pfinzing could imagine.

Meanwhile quiet had not been restored upstairs. Frau Christine had released Els from a store-room in which the old countess, after persuading her daughter to this spiteful and childish trick, had locked her. A serious discussion amongst the women followed, which was closed only by the interposition of the magistrate. Perhaps this might have been accomplished less quickly had not the leech Otto appeared as a welcome aid.

Frau Rosalinde penitently besought forgiveness, her mother was again forbidden to come to the lower story, and threatened, if she approached the sick-room, with immediate removal from the house.

This strictness was necessary to render it possible for Els to maintain her difficult position.

The day had been filled with painful incidents and shameful humiliations. The old countess had summoned two relatives, both elderly canonesses, to aid her in her assault upon the intruder, and perhaps they were the persons who advised locking up Sir Casper's nurse, to whom they denied

the right of still calling herself the bride of the young master of the house.

Frau Christine had arrived at the right time. Els was beginning to lose courage. She had found nothing which could aid her to sustain it.

Since Biberli had been deprived of his liberty she had rarely heard from Wolff, and his invalid father, for whose sake she remained in the house, seemed to view her with dislike. At first he had tried neither to speak to nor look at her, but that morning, while raising a refreshing cup to his parched lips, he had cast at her from the one eye whose lid still moved a glance whose enmity still haunted her.

Even the priest who visited him several times was by no means kindly disposed towards her. He belonged to the Dominican order, and was the confessor of the old countess and Frau Rosalinde. They must have slandered her sorely to him; and as the order of St. Francis, to which the Sisters of St. Clare belonged, was a thorn in his flesh, he bore her a grudge because, as the Abbess Kunigunde's niece, she stood by her and her convent, and threatened to win the Eysvogel household over to the Franciscans.

Before the magistrate and his wife left their niece, Herr Berthold ordered the men and maid-servants to stand in separate rows, then, in the physician's presence, introduced Els to them as the mistress whom they were to obey, and re-

quested her to choose those whose services she wished to retain. The rest would be compensated at the Town Hall the next day for their abrupt dismissal.

Els had never found it harder to say good-by to her relatives; but the leech Otto remained with her some time, and was soon joined by Conrad Teufel, thereby rendering it a little easier for her to persist in the performance of her difficult duty.

On the way home to Schweinau the magistrate and his wife talked together as eagerly as if they had just met after a long separation. They had gone back to the query how nursing the wounded criminals would affect Eva, and both hoped that Cordula's presence and encouragement would strengthen her power of resistance.

But what did this mean?

As they approached the little castle they saw from the road in the arbour, which was lighted with links, the figure of the countess. She was sitting in Frau Christine's easy chair, but Eva was nowhere in view. Had her strength failed, and was Cordula awaiting their return after putting her more delicate friend to bed? And Boemund Altrosen, who stood opposite to her, leaning against one of the pillars which supported the arched ceiling of the room, how came he here? The Pfinzings had known him from early childhood, for his father had been a dear friend and brother in arms of the magistrate; and whilst Boemund, as a boy, was

enjoying the instruction of the Benedictines in the monastery of St. Ægidius, he had been a favourite comrade of Frau Christine's son, who had fallen in battle, and always found a cordial reception in his parents' house.

With what tender anxiety the knight gazed into Cordula's pale face! Something must have befallen the blooming, vigorous huntress and daring horsewoman, and both Herr Berthold and his wife feared that it concerned Eva.

The young couple now perceived their approach, and Cordula, rising, waved her handkerchief to them. Yet how slowly she rose, how feebly the vivacious girl moved her hand.

Herr Berthold helped his wife from the saddle as quickly as possible, and both hurried anxiously towards the arbour. Frau Christine did not remain in the winding path, but though usually she strictly insisted that no one should tread on the turf, hastily crossed it to reach her goal more quickly. But ere she could put the question she longed to ask, Cordula sorrowfully exclaimed: "Don't judge me too severely. 'He who exalts himself shall be humbled,' says the Bible, and also that the first shall be last, and the last first; but I have been forced to sit upon the ground whilst Eva occupies the throne. I belong at the end of the last rank, whilst she leads the foremost."

"Please explain the riddle at once," pleaded Frau Christine.

Sir Boemund Altrosen came forward, held out his hand to his old friend, and spoke for Cordula: "The horror and loathsomeness were too much for her, whilst Jungfrau Ortlieb endured them."

"Eva remained at the hospital," the countess added dejectedly, "because a dying woman would not let her go; whilst I—the knight is right—could bear it no longer."

Frau Christine glanced triumphantly at her husband, but when she saw Cordula's pale cheeks she exclaimed: "Poor child! And there was no one here to—— One moment, Countess!"

Throwing down her riding-whip and gloves as she spoke, she was hurrying towards the sideboard on which stood the medicine-case, to prepare a strengthening drink; but Cordula stopped her, saying: "The housekeeper has already supplied the necessary stimulant. I will only ask to have my horse brought to the door, or my father will be anxious. I was obliged to await your return, because— Well, my flight from the hospital certainly was not praiseworthy, and it affords me no special pleasure to confess it. But you must not think me even more pitiful than I proved myself, so I stayed to tell you myself——"

"That it is one thing," interrupted Sir Boemund, "to nurse worthy wood-cutters, gamekeepers, fishermen, and charcoal-burners, who, when wounded and ill, look up to their gracious mistress as if she were an angel of deliverance, and quite

a different matter to mingle with the miserable rabble yonder. The bloody stripes which the executioner's lash cuts in the criminal's back do not render him more gentle; the mutilation which he curses, and the disgrace with which an abandoned woman——"

"Stop!" interrupted Cordula, whose lips and cheeks had again grown colourless. "Do not mention those scenes which have poisoned my soul. It was too hideous, too terrible! And how the woman with the red band around her neck, the mark of the rope by which she carried the stone, rushed at the other whose eye had been put out! how they fought on the floor, scratching, biting, tearing each other's hair——"

Here the tender-hearted girl, covering her convulsed face with her hands, sobbed aloud.

Frau Christine drew her compassionately to her heart, pressed the motherless child's head to her bosom, and let her weep her fill there, whilst the magistrate said to Sir Boemund: "And Eva Ortlieb also witnessed this hideous scene, yet the delicate young creature endured it?"

Altrosen nodded assent, adding eagerly, as if some memory rose vividly before him: "She often looked distressed by these horrors, but usually—how shall I express it?—usually calm and content."

"Content," repeated the magistrate thoughtfully. Then, suddenly straightening his short, broad figure, he thrust his little fat hand into a

fold of the knight's doublet, exclaiming: "Boemund, do you want to know the most difficult riddle that the Lord gives to us men to solve? It is —take heed—a woman's soul."

"Yes," replied Altrosen curtly; the word sounded like a sigh.

While speaking, his dark eye was bent on Cordula, whose head still rested on Frau Christine's breast.

Then, adjusting the bandage which since the fire had been wound around his forehead and his dark hair, he continued in a tone of explanation: "Count von Montfort sent me, when it grew dark, to accompany his daughter home. From your little castle I was directed to the hospital, where I found her amongst the horrible women. She had struggled faithfully against her loathing and disgust, but when I arrived her power of resistance was already beginning to fail. Fortunately the sedan-chair was there, for she felt that her feet would scarcely carry her back. I ordered one to be prepared for Jungfrau Ortlieb, though I remembered the dying woman who kept her. As if the matter were some easy task, she begged the countess to excuse her, and remained beside the wretched straw pallet."

The deeply agitated girl had just released herself from the matron's embrace, and begged the knight to have her Roland saddled; but Frau Christine stopped him, and entreated Cordula, for

her sake, to use her sedan-chair instead of the horse.

"If it will gratify you," replied the countess smiling; "but I should reach home safely on the piebald."

"Who doubts it?" asked the matron. "Give her your arm, husband. The bearers are ready, and you will soon overtake them on your horse, Boemund."

"The walk through the warm June night will do me good," the latter protested.

Soon after the sedan-chair which conveyed Cordula, lighted by several torch-bearers on foot and on horseback, began to move towards the city.

At St. Linhard, Boemund Altrosen, who walked beside it, asked the question, "Then I may hope, Countess? I really may?"

She nodded affectionately, and answered under her breath: "You may; but we must first try whether the flower of love which blossomed for you out of my weakness is the real one. I believe it will be."

He joyously raised her hand to his lips, but a torch-bearer's shout—"Count von Montfort and his train!"—urged him back from the sedan-chair. A few seconds after Cordula welcomed her father, who had anxiously ridden forth to meet his jewel.

CHAPTER XIV.

"I CAN hardly do more, and yet I must," groaned Frau Christine, as she gazed after the torch-bearers who preceded Cordula. Her husband, however, tried to detain her, offering to go to their young guest in her place.

But the effort was vain. The motherless child, whom the captive father probably believed to be in safety with her sensible sister, was at a post of danger, and only a woman's eye could judge whether it would do to yield to Eva's wish, which the housekeeper had just told her mistress, and allow her—it was already past midnight—to remain longer at the hospital.

She would not have hesitated to require her niece's return home had not maternal solicitude urged her to deprive her of nothing which could aid her troubled soul to regain its poise. If possible at all, it would be through devotion to an arduous work of charity that she would understand her own nature, and find an answer to the question whether, when the slanderers were silenced, she

would take the veil or cling firmly to the hopeless love which had mastered her young heart.

If she succeeded in remaining steadfast here, and, in spite of the glad consciousness of having conquered by the sign of the cross, was still loyal to her worldly love, then the latter was genuine and strong, and Eva did not belong to the convent; then her sister, the abbess, was mistaken in the girl whose soul she had guided from early childhood.

Frau Christine, who usually formed an opinion quickly and resolutely, had not dared to give Eva a positive answer the previous evening.

With sympathising emotion the matron had heard her confess that during her nocturnal wanderings a new feeling, which she could no longer still, had awakened in her breast. When she also told her the image of true love which she had formed, she could not bring herself to undeceive her.

The abbess had made a somewhat similar confession to her, the older sister, when her young heart—how long ago it seemed!—had also been mastered by love. The object of its ardent passion was no less a personage than the Burgrave von Zollern.

Frau Christine had seen his marriage with the Hapsburg princess awaken her sister's desire to renounce the world. Kunigunde was then a maiden of rare, majestic beauty, and only the Bur-

grave's exalted station had prevented his wedding "Eva," as she was called before she took the veil.

As a husband and father, he had found deep happiness in the love of the Countess Elizabeth, the future Emperor Rudolph's sister, yet he had remained a warm friend of the abbess; and when he treated Eva with such marked distinction at the dance, she owed it not only to her own charms but also to the circumstance that, like the girl whom he had loved in his youth, she bore the name of "Eva Ortlieb," and the expression of her eyes vividly recalled the happiest time in his life.

The abbess, after a still more severe renunciation, had attained even greater happiness in the convent. Her sister could not blame her for wishing the same lot for the devout young niece, whose fate seemed to bear a closer and closer resemblance to her own; but yesterday she had argued with her, for Kunigunde had insisted firmly that if the girl did not voluntarily knock at the convent door she should be forced to enter, not only for her own sake but also Sir Heinz Schorlin's. Nothing could rouse the ire of every true Christian more than the thought that a noble knight, for whose conversion Heaven had wrought a miracle, could turn a deaf ear to the summons for the sake of a girl scarcely beyond childhood. To place convent walls between the pair would therefore be a work

pleasing in the sight of God—nay, necessary for the example.

This statement sounded so resolute and imperative that Frau Christine, who knew her sister's gentle nature, had been convinced that she was obeying the mandate of a superior. Soon afterward she learned that Kunigunde had followed the dictates of the zealous prior of the Dominicans, who was regarded as the supreme judge in religious affairs. At a chance meeting she had imprudently asked this man, who had never been friendly to her or her order, to give his opinion concerning this matter, which gave her no rest.

Frau Christine had eagerly opposed her. The case of Heinz Schorlin was different from that of the Burgrave Frederick, who could never be permitted to wed the daughter of a Nuremberg merchant. If the Swiss renounced his intention of entering the monastery, there was nothing to prevent his wooing Eva. It should by no means be as the prior of the Dominicans had said: "They must both renounce the world," but, "They must test themselves, and if the world holds them firmly, and the Emperor, who is a fatherly friend to Heinz, makes no objection, it would be a duty to unite the pair."

The decisive hour for Eva was now at hand, and Frau Christine, eager to learn in what condition she should find her niece, had herself carried to the hospital.

Her husband and several men-servants accompanied her, for at this late hour the neighbourhood, where so many criminals were nursed for a short time, was by no means safe. Companions, friends, and relatives of the criminals were often attracted thither by sympathy, curiosity, or business affairs. Whoever had occasion to shun appearing by daylight in a place which never lacked bailiffs and city soldiers, slunk to the hospital at night.

As a heavy rain had just begun to fall, the short distance to be traversed by the magistrate and his wife was empty. Ample provision also seemed to have been made to guard the place of healing, for several armed troopers belonging to the city guard were pacing up and down before the board fence which surrounded it, and the approach of the late visitors was heralded by the deep baying of large hounds.

The magistrate was well known here, and the doorkeeper, roused from his sleep, hastened to light the way for him and his wife with a lantern. In spite of the planks which had been placed in the courtyard, the task of crossing it was by no means easy; for the night was intensely dark, and if the foot passed beyond the boards, it plunged into the mire, on which they floated rather than lay.

At first the barking of the dogs had drowned every other sound, but as they approached the

house thatched with straw, where the wounded men were nursed, harsh voices, interrupted at times by the angry oaths of some patient roused from sleep, or the watchman's command to keep quiet, reached them in a loud uproar.

A narrow passage dimly lighted by a lantern led to the women's quarters, where Eva had remained. The magistrate entered the men's dormitory to make an inspection, while his wife, needing no guidance, passed on to the women, meeting no one on her way except a Sister of Charity and two men-servants who, under the guidance of a sleepy Dominican monk, were bearing out the corpse of some one who had just passed away.

Sister Hildegard, who was sitting at the door of the dormitory, half asleep, started up as Frau Christine crossed the threshold.

The knight's widow, a vigorous matron, whose hair had long been grey, pointed with the rosary in her hand to the end of the long, dimly lighted apartment, and said in a low tone: "The sick woman seems to be asleep now. The prior sent the old Dominican to whom Eva is talking. He is said to be the most learned and eloquent member of the order. If I am right, he came here to appeal to your niece's conscience. At least his first question was for her, and you see how eagerly he is speaking. When yonder sick woman seemed to be drawing near her end she asked for the sacrament, which was administered by the

Dominican. It was a sorrowful farewell on account of her children, but the barber thinks we may perhaps save her yet. Father Benedictus, the old Minorite, who was found on the road and brought to us, seems, on the other hand, to be dying. We will gladly keep him in the Beguines home until the angel summons him. Unfortunately, yonder poor woman's third day will end to-morrow. We are not permitted to shelter her here any longer, and if we turn her out——"

"What is the matter with the woman?" interrupted Frau Christine, but the other gazed into her face with warm sympathising affection and such tender entreaty that the magistrate's wife, before she began her reply, exclaimed: "So it is the old, pitiful story! But let her stay! Yes, even though, instead of every pound of farthings, she cost us ten times as much in gold! But we will spare what is necessary for her. I see by your face that it will not be wasted."

"Certainly not," replied Sister Hildegard gratefully. "Oh, how she came here! Now, it is true, she has more than she needs. Your dear niece—she is an angel of charity—sent her Kätterle out to get what was wanted. But where is the girl?"

She gazed around the spacious chamber as she spoke, but could not find Kätterle.

True, a dim light pervaded the whole apartment, and Sister Hildegard, referring to it, added: "The light keeps many of the patients awake, and

we have a better use for the pennies which the oil and chips cost. When there are brilliant entertainments to be given, or works of mercy done which the whole world sees, the Honourables let their gold flow freely enough, but who beholds the abodes of horror? We look best in the dark, and no one will miss what we save in light."

Certainly no one present incurred any danger of seeing at this hour the pitiable spectacles visible by day; for what was occurring at the opposite end of the room could not be perceived from the door. So when it closed Eva could not distinguish who had entered.

But this was agreeable to Frau Christine; for before going to her niece she wished to inquire about the woman by whom she had been detained.

Like the others, she was lying upon the board platform which surrounded the four walls of the room, interrupted only by the door through which she had just passed. It rose in a slanting direction towards the wall, that the sufferers' heads might be higher than their feet. Instead of cushions, it was covered with a thick layer of straw, the beds of the patients who were nursed here. It seemed to be changed very rarely, for especially near the door at which the two women were still standing a damp, unpleasant odour emanated from the straw. It belonged here, however, as feathers are a part of birds, and the people who were nursed within its walls were accustomed to nothing better. When,

fifteen years before, the oversight of the hospital was entrusted to Frau Christine, she had found the condition of affairs still worse, and the idea of procuring beds for the injured persons to be cured here was as far from her thoughts, or those of the rest of the world, as cushioning the stable.

That was the way things were at Schweinau. Straw of all sorts might be expected to be found here, not only on the wooden platform but on the floor, in the yard, and everywhere else, as surely as leaves upon the ground of a wood in the autumn. To leave the house without taking stalks in the hair and garments was as impossible as for any person accustomed to better conditions, who did not wish to faint from discomfort, to do without a scent bottle.

Formerly Frau Christine had endeavoured to obtain better air, but even her kind-hearted husband had laughed at the foolish idea, because such things would benefit only herself and some of the nurses. In the taverns usually frequented by the inmates of the hospital they learned to endure a different atmosphere, which was stifling to him.

After contagious diseases certain precautions were always taken. On Sunday morning it was even fumigated with juniper-berries on hot tin and boiling vinegar.

Frau Christine had introduced this disinfectant herself by the advice of Otto the leech, when all who had been brought hither with open wounds,

among them vigorous young men, had died like flies. At that time the distinguished physician had even succeeded in getting the Honourable Council to defray the cost of having the walls newly white-washed and fresh clay stamped on the floor. He had also directed that the old straw should be replaced by clean every Sunday morning, and now matters were better still, for the rule was that every sick person should have a fresh layer. True, it was not always fulfilled, and many a person was forced to be content with his predecessor's couch.

In the women's room, however, the change of straw was more rigidly required. The nurse herself attended to it, and Sister Hildegard gave her energetic assistance.

In difficult cases the influence of the leech Otto was called to her aid, but he had grown old and no longer came to Schweinau. Two barbers now cared for the bandaging and healing of the wounds, and if they were at a loss the younger city physician was summoned.

Sister Hildegard now pointed to the couch beside which the Dominican was talking to Eva, and said: "She is the widow of a carrier and the child of worthy people; her father was the sexton of St. Sebald's. True, he died long ago, at the same time as her mother. It was twelve years since, during the plague.

"Reicklein, yonder, had no other relatives here —her parents were from Bamberg—but she was

well off, and her husband, Veit, earned enough by his travels through the country. But on St. Blaise's day, early in the month of February, during a trip to Vogtland ——, it was at Hof—— he was overtaken by a snowstorm, and the worthy man was found frozen under a drift, with his staff and pouch. The sad news reached her just after the birth of a little boy, and there were two other mouths to feed besides. Her savings went quickly enough, and she fell into dire poverty, for she had not yet recovered her strength, and could not do housework. During Passion Week she sold her bed to pay what she had borrowed and to feed the children. It was cold, she had not a copper, nor any possibility of earning anything. Then the rest went, too, and there was no way of getting food enough for the children and herself.

"But as her father had been in the employ of the city and was an honest man, by the advice of the provost of St. Sebald's, who had been her confessor from childhood, she applied to the Honourable Council, and received the answer that old Hans Schab was by no means forgotten, and therefore, to relieve her need, she was referred to the beadle, who would give her the permit which enabled her to ask alms from those who went to St. Sebald's Church, and had already afforded many a person ample support.

"For her children's sake she crushed the pride which rebelled against it, and stood at the church

door, not once, but again and again. The other mendicants, however, treated her so roughly, and the cruel enmity with which they tried to crowd her out of her place seemed so unbearable, that she could not hold out. Once, when they insulted her too much, and again thrust her back so spitefully that not even one of the many churchgoers noticed her, she fled to her children in the little room, determined to stop this horrible begging. This happened the Saturday before Whitsuntide, and as she had gone out hoping this time to bring something back, she had promised the children food enough to satisfy their hunger. They should have some Whitsuntide cakes, too, as they did years ago. When she reached the house and little Walpurga—you'll see her presently, a pretty child six years old—ran to meet her, asking for the cakes and the bread to satisfy her hunger, while Annelein, who is somewhat older, but less bright and active, did the same, she felt as if she should die, and carrying the baby, which she had held in her arms while begging at the church door, back into the room, she told Walpurga to watch it, as she had long been in the habit of doing, until she came back with the bread.

"For the children's sake she would try begging once more, but she could not go to St. Sebald's.

"So she went from house to house, asking alms; but she was a well-formed woman, who did not show her serious illness. She kept herself tidy,

too, and looked better in her poor rags than many who were better off. Had she carried her nursing infant, perhaps she might have succeeded better, but even the most compassionate housewives either turned her from their doors or offered her work at the wash-tub, or in cleaning or gardening. The weakness from which she had suffered since the birth of her child made stooping so painful that she could not do what they required.

"When she was at last obliged to turn homeward, because the baby had probably been screaming for her a long time, she had only one small copper coin, with which she went to the baker Kilian's, in the Stopfelgasse, to ask for a penny's worth of bread. The baker's wife was not there, and her spinster sister-in-law, an elderly, ill-natured woman, was serving the customers in her place.

"As she turned to cut the bit of bread, and all sorts of nice sweet cakes lay on the shining counters before poor Riecklein, the children seemed to stand before her, headed by Walpurga, asking for the cakes and the bread she had promised them to eat their fill; and as no one was passing in the quiet street, Satan stirred within her for the first time, and a sweet jumble slid into the little basket on her arm. Had she stopped there she might have escaped unpunished; but there were two hungry little beaks agape in the nest, and she saw a pretty lamb with a little red flag on its back. If Walpurga could only have it! And with the

clumsiness due to her inexperience in such matters she seized that, too, and put it with the other.

"Meanwhile the sister-in-law had turned, and instead of enquiring at a time so near the holy feast what had induced her to commit such a crime, she shrieked, 'Stop thief!' and similar cries.

"So the widow was taken to the Hole, and as she had hitherto borne an unsullied reputation and was the child of a good man, justice allowed itself to be satisfied with having her scourged with rods privately instead of in public. So she came here. But as her poor body was too fragile to withstand all the trouble which had come upon her, she had a violent attack of fever, and a few hours ago death stretched its hand towards her."

"And the children?" asked Frau Christine, deeply moved.

"She was allowed to have the baby," answered Sister Hildegard, "but she told us about the others and their desolate condition. In the delirium of fever she saw them stealing and the constable seizing them. Then your Eva encouraged me to send for them by promising to provide their food. So they came here. The worker on cloth from whom she rented her little room had helped them, and it was from her that Sister Pauline, whom I sent there, first learned that Walpurga, for whose sake she had so sadly

forgotten her duty, was not even her own child, but an adopted one whom her late husband, on one of his trips, had found abandoned on the high-road at Vierzehnheiligen, beside an image of the Virgin, and brought home with him."

Here Sister Hildegard paused, and Frau Christine also remained silent a long time.

Yet, it was horrible here, and the air was impure; but had Countess Cordula looked more closely she would probably have seen one of the beautiful flowers which often bloomed amidst all the weeds, the poisonous and parasitic vegetation.

Eva was right to pity this woman, and if her life could be saved she herself would relieve her necessities and secure her children's future. She silently made this resolve whilst the Sister led the way to the couch of the scourged thief. The unfortunate woman should learn that God often compels us to traverse the roughest and stoniest paths in the wilderness ere he leads us into the Promised Land.

Eva was so deeply absorbed in her conversation with the Dominican that she did not see her aunt until she stood before her.

They greeted each other with a silent nod, and a smile of satisfaction flitted over the girl's face as she motioned to the sleeper whose slumber she was watching.

The young mother's pretty face still glowed with the flush of fever. One arm clasped the baby,

which lay amidst the white linen Kätterle had just brought. He was a pretty child, who showed no traces of the poverty in which he had been reared. Beside the widow were two little girls about six years old. The one at the left was sound asleep, with her head resting on her little fat arm. The other, at the sick woman's right, pressed her fair head upon her breast. Her slumber was very light, and she often opened her large, blue eyes and gazed with touching anxiety at the sick woman. This was the adopted child, Walpurga, and never had the matron beheld amongst the poor and suffering so lovely a human flower as this little six-year-old child, struggling with sleep in her affectionate desire to render aid. The other little girl's free hand also touched her mother, and thus these four, united in poverty and sorrow, but also in love, seemed to form a single whole. What a peaceful, charming picture!

Frau Christine gazed with earnest sympathy at each member of this group. How well-formed was every one! how pure and innocent the features of the children looked! how kind and loving those of the suffering mother, who was a thief, and whose tender back had felt the scourge of the executioner!

The thought made her shudder. But when little Walpurga, half asleep, raised her tiny hand and lovingly stroked the wounded shoulder of her adopted mother, the matron, as usual when anything pleasant

moved her heart, longed to have her husband at her side. How easily, since he was so near, she could afford him a sight of this touching picture! It should prove that she had been right to let Eva remain here.

Faithful to her custom of permitting no delay in the execution of a good resolution, she wanted to send Kätterle to call her husband, but the girl could not be found.

Then Frau Christine went herself, beckoning to Eva to follow; but they had scarcely reached the centre of the room when a peal of shrill laughter greeted them from a couch on the left.

The person from whom it came was the barber's widow, whose attack had alarmed Eva so terribly the day before in front of the pillory. It pealed loudly and shrilly through the stillness of the night, and when the matron turned angrily to reprove the person who so inconsiderately disturbed the rest of the others, the woman clapped her hands and instantly a chorus of sharp, screaming voices rose around her. The barber's widow, who knew everybody who lived in Nuremberg, had recognised the magistrate's wife at her entrance, and secretly incited her neighbours to follow her example and, as soon as she gave the signal, demand better fare and make Frau Christine, the patroness of the hospital, feel what they thought of the cruelty of her husband, who had delivered them to the executioner.

The female thieves and swindlers—in short, all the reprobate women around Frau Ratzer, whose feet had just been tied on account of her unruly behaviour in the Countess von Montfort's presence—obeyed her signal, and the fierce voices raised in demand and invective woke those who were sleeping farther away. Weeping, wailing, and screaming they started up, clamouring to know what danger threatened them, whilst Frau Ratzer and her fellow-conspirators shrieked for beer or wine instead of water, for meat with the black bread and wretched broth and, yelling and howling, bade the patroness tell her husband that they thought him a brute and a bloodhound.

There was a hideous, confused, ear-splitting din, which threatened serious consequences, for some of the women, leaving their straw beds, hastened towards the door or surrounded Frau Christine and Eva with uplifted fists and threatening nails.

The warning voices of the matrons, to whose aid the Beguines had hastened, were drowned by the uproar, but the danger which specially threatened Eva, whom the barber's widow pointed out to her neighbour who had stolen a child to train it to beg, was soon ended, for the wild cries had reached the men's building, from which Herr Berthold Pfinzing came hurrying in, accompanied by the superintendent, his assistants, and several monks.

If the women reproached the magistrate, who in reality was a lenient judge, with being a cruel tyrant, they were now to learn that he certainly did not lack uncompromising energy. The unpleasant position in which he found his wife and his beloved godchild did not incline him to gentleness. He would have liked to have tied the hands of all these women, most of whom had forfeited the consideration due their sex. This was really done to the most unruly, while the barber's widow was carried to the prison-chamber, which the hospital did not lack.

After quiet was at last restored and Frau Christine had told her husband that she had been attacked while on her way to show him a delightful scene in the midst of all this terrible misery, he angrily exclaimed: "A magnificent picture! Balm for the eyes and ears of your own brother's virginal daughter! The saints be praised that you both escaped so easily. Can there be in the worst hell anything more horrible than what has just been witnessed here? Really, where a Countess Cordula cannot endure——"

Here Frau Christine soothingly interrupted her irate husband, and so great was her influence over him, that his tone sounded like friendly encouragement as he added: "You wanted to show me something special, but I was detained over there. Though it was late, I wanted to see the

worthy fellow again. What a man he is! I mean Sir Heinz Schorlin's squire."

"Poor Biberli?" asked Eva eagerly; and there was a faint tone of reproach in her voice as she continued, "You promised to look after him."

"So I did, child," the magistrate protested. "But justice must take its course, and the rack is part of the examination by torture. He might easily have lost his tongue, and if his master doesn't return soon and another accuser should appear, who knows what will happen!"

"But that must not, shall not be!" cried Eva, the old defiance echoing imperiously in her voice. "Heinz Schorlin—you said so yourself—would not plead in vain for mercy to the Emperor; and before I will see the faithful fellow——"

"Gently, child," whispered Frau Christine to her niece, laying her hand on her arm, but the magistrate, shaking his finger at her, answered soothingly: "Jungfrau Ortlieb would rather thrust her own little feet into the Spanish boot. Be comforted! The three pairs we have are all too large to squeeze them."

Eva lowered her eyes in embarrassment, and exclaimed in a modest, beseeching tone: "But, uncle, do not you, too, feel that it would be cruel and unjust to make this honest fellow a cripple in return for his faithful services?"

"I do feel it," answered Herr Berthold, his face assuming an expression of regret; "and for

that very reason I ventured to take a girl over whom I have no authority out of her service."

"Kätterle?" asked Eva anxiously.

Her uncle nodded assent, adding: "First hear what interested me so quickly in the strange fellow. At the first charge, which merely accused him of having carried a message of love from his master to Jungfrau Ortlieb, I interceded for him, and yesterday the other magistrates, to whom I had explained the case, joined me. So he escaped with a sentence of exile from the city for five years. I hoped it would not be necessary to present the second accusation, for it was signed by no name, but merely bore three crosses, and for a long time most of the magistrates, following my example, have considered such things as treacherous attacks made by cowards who shun the light of day; but it was impossible to suppress it entirely, because the law commands me to withhold no complaint made to the court. So it was read aloud, and Hans Teufel's motion to let it drop without any action met with no approval, warmly as I supported it.

"We must not blame the gentlemen. They all wish to act for your benefit, and desire nothing except a clear understanding of this vexatious business. But in that indictment Biberli was charged with having forced his way into an Honourable's house at night to obtain admittance for his master. In collusion with a maid-servant he

was also said to have maintained the love correspondence between Herr Ernst Ortlieb's two daughters, a Swiss knight, and Boemund Altrosen."

"Infamous!" cried Eva. "What, in the name of all the saints, have we to do with Altrosen?"

"You certainly have very little," replied Frau Christine, "but the Ortlieb mansion has all the more. To-night he will again be seen before its door, and if still later he appears with his lute under Countess Cordula's windows and is heard singing to her, it wouldn't surprise me."

"And people," exclaimed Eva with increasing indignation, "will add another link to the chain of slander. If a Vorkler and her companions repeat the calumny, who can wonder? But that the magistrates should believe such shameful things about the brothers of their own fellow-member——"

"It was precisely because they do not believe it and wish to keep you away from the court," her uncle interrupted, "that they insisted upon the examination. They desired to show the people by their verdict and the severity of the procedures how thoroughly in earnest they were. But whilst I was compelled to absent myself an hour because the Emperor wished to inspect the new towers on the city wall, and I had to attend him in the character of showman, they sentenced the poor fellow, since his loose tongue had brought the whole rout

and rabble against him, to torture so severe that I shuddered when told of it."

"And Biberli?" asked Eva, trembling with suspense.

"All honour is due the man!" cried Herr Berthold, raising his cap. "The rods scourged his fettered limbs, his thumbs were pressed in the screws, bound to the ladder, he was dragged over the larded hare——"

"Oh, hush!" cried Frau Christine with uplifted hands, and her husband nodded understandingly. Then, with a faint sigh, he added:

"Why should I torture you with these horrors? Nothing was spared him. Yet the worthy fellow stuck to his statement that he had accompanied his master to your house in the full moonlight to take a somnambulist who had wandered out of the open door back to her friends. Sir Heinz Schorlin had met Jungfrau Ortlieb only once—at the dance in the Town Hall. Though he had sometimes appeared before her father's house, it was not on account of Herr Ernst's daughters, but—and this was an allusion to Cordula von Montfort—for the sake of another lady.

"After the lightning had killed his master's horse under him he had avoided every woman, because he wished to enter a monastery. He could prove all these statements by many witnesses. Yesterday he named them, and Count Gleichen and his retainers appeared with several others.

The Minorite Benedictus was vainly sought at the Franciscans."

"He is here in the house of the Beguines," replied Frau Christine, "and weak as he is, he will have strength enough to make a deposition in the knight's favour."

The magistrate said that this might be necessary if a new charge were brought against the servitor, Kätterle, and perhaps even Sir Heinz Schorlin himself. Rarely had he seen a bad cause maintained with so much obstinacy. The complainants had witnesses who testified under oath what they had heard in taverns and tap-rooms from Sir Seitz Siebenburg and those who repeated his tales. Their examination had lasted a long time, and what they alleged was as absurd as possible, yet for that very reason difficult to refute. These depositions had aided the cause of the accused, but in consequence of such numerous charges many questions of course were put to Biberli, and thus the torture had been cruelly increased and prolonged.

Here Eva interrupted the speaker with another outburst of indignation, but he only shrugged his shoulders pityingly, saying: "Gently, child! A shoemaker who recently upbraided the 'Honourables' for something similar was publicly scourged, and if cruelties have been practised here it is the fault of the law, not of the judges. But worse yet may come, if the pack is not silenced by a higher will."

"The Emperor?" asked the girl with quivering lips.

"Yes, child," was the reply, "and your old godfather had thought of bringing this evil cause before our royal master. He gladly exercises mercy, but only after carefully investigating the pros and cons. In this case there is but one person in whom he has full confidence, and who is also in a position to tell him the exact truth."

"Heinz Schorlin!" cried Eva. "He must be informed at once, without delay."

"Certainly," replied Herr Pfinzing quietly. "And since, as the uncle and godfather of Jungfrau Eva, who would have gladly undertaken the ride, I could not order her horse to be saddled, I sent some one else whose heart also will point out the way."

"Uncle!" Eva eagerly interrupted, raising her clasped hands in gratitude. "But whom can you——"

Here she hesitated, then suddenly exclaimed as if sure of her point: "Oh, I know the messenger, Countess von Montfort——"

"You've aimed too high," replied Herr Berthold smiling, "yet I think the choice was no worse. Your maid, child, the poor fellow's sweetheart."

Frau Christine and Eva, in the same breath, uttered an exclamation of surprise and assent, and both asked how the magistrate had chanced to select her.

A waggon from Schwabach, which happened

opportunely to be on its way to Siebenburg, had brought Biberli to Schweinau on its homeward trip, just before the magistrate and his wife reached the hospital.

Kätterle had been present when the tortured man was brought out and laid upon his couch of straw.

She did not recognise him until, with pathetic reproach, he called her by name and, horrified by the spectacle he presented, she fell upon her knees. But the couch at her side had already been prepared for him, and she did not need to rise again in order to stroke him, comfort him, and promise not to desert him, even if he should be a miserable cripple for life.

When the magistrate approached the couple, to offer Biberli his friendly aid, the latter faltered that he had only one desire—to see his beloved master once more. Besides, his case was hopeless unless the knight obtained a pardon for him from the Emperor Rudolph, for his persecutors would not cease their pursuit of him, and he could not endure the torture a second time.

Here the magistrate paused in his narrative, for he thought of an incident which he was reluctant to mention in the presence of the Dominican who had administered the sacrament to the suffering widow and now joined the group of listeners. This was, that a member of the latter's order had approached Biberli and exhorted him

not to fear another examination by torture, for the Lord gave the innocent strength to maintain the truth even under the keenest suffering. A peculiar smile hovered around the lips of the poor tortured fellow, which Herr Berthold fully understood; for the brave servitor had by no means stuck to the truth during the pangs inflicted upon him.

"Oh, my dear ones," Herr Pfinzing continued, "a harder heart than mine would have been touched by what I saw and heard beside that couch of straw when I was left alone with poor Biberli and his sweetheart. If you could have seen how Kätterle threw herself upon her lover after I had told her that even the most agonizing torture could not force him to confirm the charge which had been brought against her! Rarely does one mortal pour forth such a flood of ardent gratitude upon another; and when Biberli repeated that his dear master's help would be necessary to protect her and him from another examination, she offered to go in search of him at once, notwithstanding the rain and the darkness.

"Then I thought that no messenger could be found who was more familiar with the course of affairs, and at the same time inspired with more loving zeal. So, as the waggon in which Biberli had come was still waiting outside, I spoke to the carter, who had brought a load of wheat to Nuremburg, and now, on his way home, had ample room

under the tilt. I knew the man, and we soon came to an agreement. From Schwabach, his brother, who knows every foot of the road, will take her to the imperial troops who are fighting with the Siebenburgs. I undertook to arrange with you for her absence. She is now rolling along in the old carter Apel's waggon towards Schwabach and Sir Heinz Schorlin."

Hitherto the magistrate had maintained his composure, but now his deep voice lost its firmness, and it was neither the loving words of appreciation whispered by his wife nor the gratitude which Eva tenderly displayed that checked his speech, but the remembrance of the parting between the man so cruelly tortured and his sweetheart.

Biberli had hoped that she would nurse him; the sight of her would have cheered his eyes and heart, yet he sent her out into darkness and danger. Gratitude and love, the consciousness that just now she could be of infinite importance to him and do much for him, bound her to his couch like so many fetters, yet she had gone, and had even assumed the appearance of doing so willingly and being confident of success.

How their faces had brightened when the magistrate told them that his wife and Eva would take charge of him, and he himself would see that he had a better bed!

Biberli murmured sadly: "Straw and I have

been used to each other in many a tavern, but now a somewhat softer couch might be of service, for wherever my racked body was touched I believe there would be something out of joint."

Herr Berthold had no reason to be ashamed of his emotion, for he had learned from the barber that the poor fellow had by no means exaggerated, and, as a witness of part of the torture, he knew that even the most cruel anguish had not conquered the faithful Biberli's firm resolve to bring neither his master nor his sweetheart before the judge.

In recalling this noble act of the lowly servitor he grew eloquent, and described minutely what the poor fellow had suffered, and how, after Kätterle had left him, he lay motionless, with his thin, pale face irradiated by a grateful smile.

The women, too, and the monk Ægidius, an old Minorite, who had been watching beside the aged Brother of his order, Benedictus, and had just joined them, shed tears at his story; but Eva, from the very depths of her soul, exclaimed aloud, "Happy is he who is permitted to endure such tortures for love's sake!"

The others gazed in surprise at the young girl who, with her clasped hands pressed upon her heaving bosom, and her large eyes uplifted, looked as if she beheld heaven opening before her.

The old Minorite's heart swelled at this confession and the sight of the maiden. Thus, though far

less richly endowed with the divine gift of beauty, he had seen St. Clare absorbed in prayer. The words uttered by the fresh lips of this favoured girl, whom he beheld for the first time, expressed a feeling which might guide her into the path of the Holy Martyrs and, filled with pious enthusiasm, he approached, drew her clasped hands away from her breast, pressed them in his own and, remembering what the Abbess Kunigunde had told him yesterday beside the couch of Benedictus concerning her severe conflict, exclaimed :

"Whoever said that, knows the words of Holy Writ which promise the crown of eternal life to those who are faithful unto death. Obey the voice, my child, which unites you to those who are called. St. Clare herself summons you to her heavenly home."

The others listened to the old monk in silence. Eva slightly shook her head. But when the disappointed Minorite released her hands she clasped his thin one, saying modestly: "How could I be worthy of so sublime a promise? The poor servant on his straw bed, with his T and St embroidered on cap and cloak, of whom my uncle told us, has a tenfold greater claim, I think, to the crown of life, for which, as yet, I have been permitted to do so little. But I hope to win it, and the saint who calls everything that breathes and lives brothers and sisters, as children of the same exalted Father, cannot teach that the fidelity shown in the world de-

serves less reward than that of the chosen ones in the convent."

"That is a foolish and sacrilegious opinion," answered the Dominican sternly. "We will take care, my dear daughter, to guide your soul from pathless wandering into the right path which Holy Church has marked out for you."

He turned his back upon the group as he spoke, but the grey-haired Minorite, smiling sadly, turned to Eva, saying: "I cannot contradict him. Fidelity to those whom we love, my child, is far less meritorious than that which we show to Heaven. To you, daughter, its doors have already opened. How strong must be the pleasure felt by the children of the world in this brief earthly happiness, since they are so ready to sacrifice for it the certainty of eternal bliss! Your error will grieve the abbess and Father Benedictus."

With these words he, too, took his leave, but Frau Christine whispered to her niece: "These monks are not the Holy Church to which we both belong as obedient daughters. To my poor mind and heart it seems as if the Saviour would deem you right."

"Amen," added the magistrate, who had heard his wife's murmured words.

CHAPTER XV.

Day followed day, a week elapsed, and no message had reached Schweinau from Heinz Schorlin or Kätterle.

The magistrate had learned that the Siebenburg brothers, with the robber knights who had joined them, were obstinately defending their castles and making it difficult for Heinz Schorlin to perform his task. The day before news had come that the Absbach's strong mountain fortress had fallen; that the allied knights, in a sortie which merged into a miniature battle, had been defeated, and the Siebenburgs could not hold out much longer; but in the stress of his duties the knight seemed to have forgotten to make the slightest effort in behalf of his faithful servant. At least the protonotary Gottlieb, a friend of Herr Berthold, through whose hands passed all letters addressed to the Emperor, positively assured them that, though plenty of military reports had arrived, in not a single one had the young commander mentioned his servant even by a word. He, the protonotary, had taken advantage of a favourable hour to urge his royal master,

as a reward for Biberli's rare fidelity, to protect him from further persecution by the citizens of Nuremberg; but the Emperor Rudolph did not even allow him to finish, because, as a matter of principle, he refrained from interference in matters whose settlement rightfully pertained to the Honourable Council.

When soon after Herr Pfinzing availed himself of a report which he had to deliver to the Emperor to intercede himself for the valiant fellow, the Hapsburg, with the ruler's strong memory, recalled the protonotary's plea and referred Herr Berthold to the answer the former had received, remarking, less graciously than usual, that the imperial magistrate ought to know that he would be the last to assail the privileges which he had himself bestowed upon the city.

Finally even Burgrave Frederick, whose sympathy had been enlisted in Biberli's behalf by Herr Berthold, fared no better.

His interests were often opposed to those of the Council and, kindly as was his disposition, disputes concerning many questions of law were constantly occurring between him and the Honourables. When he began to persuade the Emperor to prevent by a pardon the cruelty which the Council intended to practise upon a servant of Sir Heinz Schorlin, who was doing such good service in the field, the sovereign told even him, his friend and brother-in-law, who had toiled so energetically to

secure him the crown, that he would not interfere, though it were in behalf of a beloved brother, with the decrees of the Council, and the noble petitioner was silenced by the reasons which he gave. The Burgrave deemed the Emperor's desire to maintain the Honourables' willingness to grant the large loan he intended to ask to fill his empty treasury still more weighty than those with which he had repulsed Herr Pfinzing.

On the other hand, the pardon granted to Ernst Ortlieb and Wolff Eysvogel could only tend to increase the good will of the Council. The former was given at once, the latter only conditionally after the First Losunger of the city, with several other Honourables, had recommended it. The Emperor thought it advisable to defer this act of clemency. A violation of the peace of the country committed under his own eyes ought not to be pardoned during his stay in the place where the bloody deed was committed. It would have cast a doubt upon the serious intent of the important measure which threatened with the severest punishment any attempt upon the lives and property of others.

So long as the Emperor held his court at Nuremberg, Wolff, against whom no accuser had yet appeared, must remain concealed. When the sovereign had left the city he might again mingle with his fellow-citizens. An imperial letter alluding to the gratitude which Rudolph owed to

the soldiers of Marchfield, to whose band the evil-doer belonged, and the whole good city of Nuremberg for the hospitable reception tendered to him and his household, should shield from punishment the young patrician who had only drawn his sword in self-defence, and fulfil the petition of the Council for Wolff Eysvogel's restoration to the rights which he had forfeited.

The news of this promise gave Els the first happy hour after long days of discomfort and the most arduous mental conflict. True, the measures adopted by her friends seemed to have guarded her from the attacks of the old Countess Rotterbach; but Frau Rosalinde, since she had been allowed more freedom to move about than her mother, who had been confined to the upper story, felt like a boat drifting rudderless down the stream. She needed guidance and, as Els now ruled the house, asked direction from her for even the most simple matters. Clinging to her like a child deserted by its nurse, she told her the most hostile and spiteful remarks which the countess never failed to make whenever it suited her daughter to bear her company. During the last few days the old lady had again won Rosalinde over to her side, and in consequence an enmity towards Els had sprung up, which was often very spiteful in its manifestations, and was the more difficult to bear, the more rigidly her position as daughter of the house forbade energetic resistance.

But most painful of all to the volunteer nurse was the sick man's manner; for though Herr Casper rarely regained perfect consciousness, he showed his unfriendly disposition often enough by glances, gestures, and words stammered with painful effort.

Yet the brave girl's patience seemed inexhaustible, and she resolutely performed even the most arduous tasks imposed by nursing the sufferer. Nay, the thought that Wolff owed his life to him aided her always to be kind to her father-in-law, no matter how much he wounded her, and to tend him no less carefully than she had formerly cared for her invalid mother.

So she had held out valiantly until, at the end of a long, torturing week, something occurred which destroyed her courage. On returning from an errand in the city, she was received at the door of the sick-room by her future mother-in-law with the statement that she would take charge of her husband herself, and no longer allow the intruder to keep her from the place which belonged to her alone. The old countess's power of persuasion had strengthened her courage, and the unwonted energy of the weak, more than yielding woman, exerted so startling and at the same time disheartening an effect upon the wearied, tortured young creature that she attempted no resistance. The entreaties of the leech and kind Herr Teufel, however, induced her to persist a short time longer.

But when, soon after, the same incident occurred a second time, it seemed impossible to remain in their house even another day.

Without opposing her lover's mother, she retired to her chamber and, weeping silently, spite of the earnest entreaties of the Sister of Charity, packed the few articles she had brought with her and prepared to leave the post maintained with so much difficulty. To be again with Eva under the protection of her uncle and aunt now seemed the highest goal of her longing. She did not wish to go home; for after his liberation from the tower her father had had a long conversation with Wolff and old Berthold Vorchtel, and then, at the desire of the Council, had ridden to Augsburg and Ulm to arrange the affairs of the Eysvogel firm. He had felt that he could be spared by his family, knowing that his younger daughter was safe at Schweinau, and having heard that Wolff's pardon would not be long delayed.

Eva, too, had experienced toilsome days and many an anxious night. True, Biberli and the carrier's widow, with her children, had been moved to the Beguines' house, where she could pursue her charitable work safe from the rude attacks of the criminal inmates of the hospital; but what heavy cares had burdened her concerning the two patients for whom she was battling with death! how eagerly she watched for tidings from the neighbourhood of the Siebenburgs! what hours of trouble were

caused by the prior of the Dominicans and his envoys, who strove to convince her that her intention of renouncing her conventual life was treason to God, and that the boldness with which she had released herself from the former guides of her spiritual life and sought her own way would lead her to heresy and perdition! How painful, too, was the feeling that she was being examined to discover whether the Abbess Kunigunde had any share in her change of purpose!

The torture to which stronger men rarely succumbed seemed to threaten the life of the more delicate ex-schoolmaster. At first the leech Otto, who, to please Els and Frau Christine, and touched by the brave spirit of this humble man, had daily visited Biberli, believed that he could not save him. On the straw pallet, and with the incompetent nursing at the hospital, he would have died very speedily, and what would have befallen his poor mangled toes and fingers in the hands of the barbers who managed affairs there?

At the Beguines the kindly, skilful old physician had bandaged his hands and feet as carefully as if he had been the most aristocratic gentleman, and no prince could have been more tenderly and patiently watched by trained nurses; for, wonderful to relate, Eva, who had so willingly left her sick mother to her sister's care, and had often been vexed with herself because she could not even remotely equal Els beside the couch of the beloved invalid,

rendered the mangled squire every service with a touch so light and firm that the old physician often watched her with glad astonishment.

Caution, the quality she most lacked, seemed to have suddenly waked from a long slumber with doubly clear, far-seeing eyes. If it was necessary to turn the sick man, she paid special heed to every aching spot in his tortured body, and invented contrivances which she arranged with patient care to save him pain.

Her own bed had been placed in the widow's chamber next to Biberli's, and from the night that her Aunt Christine had permitted her to remain in the Beguine house, she, who formerly had loved sleep and slumbered soundly, had been beside the sick woman at the least sign. On the third day she rendered her, with her own hands, every service for which she had formerly needed a Beguine's aid. She had possessed the gift of uttering words of cheer and comfort even to her invalid mother better than any one else, and often gave new courage to the suffering man when almost driven to despair by the anguish of pain assailing him in ten places at once. How kindly she taught him what comfort the sufferer finds who not only moves his lips and turns his rosary in prayer, as he had hitherto done, but commends himself and his pain to Him who endured still worse agonies on the cross! What a smile of content rested on the lips of the man who, in the ravings of fever, had so often re-

peated the words "steadfast and true," when she told him that he had done honour most marvellously to his favourite virtue, represented by the T and St, and might expect his master's praise and gratitude!

All these things fell from her lips more warmly the more vividly she conjured up the image of the man for whose sake the gallant fellow had endured this martyrdom, the happier it made her to help Heinz, though without his knowledge, to pay the great debt of gratitude which he owed the faithful servitor. She was not aware of it, but the strongest of all educational powers—sorrow and love—were transforming the unsocial, capricious "little saint" into a noble, self-sacrificing woman. She was training herself to be what she desired to become to her lover, and the secret power whose influence upon her whole being she distinctly felt at each success, she herself called—remembering the last words of her dying mother—"the forge fire of life."

At first it had been extremely painful for Biberli to allow himself to be nursed with such devoted, loving care by the very person from whom he had earnestly endeavoured to estrange his master; but soon the warmest gratitude cast every other feeling into the shade, and when he woke from the light slumber into which he frequently fell and saw Eva beside his bed, his heart swelled and he often felt as if Heaven had sent her to him to restore the best

gifts for which he was struggling—life and health. When he began to recover, the faithful fellow clung to her with the utmost devotion; but this by no means lessened his love for his master and his absent sweetheart. On the contrary, the farther his convalescence progressed the more constantly and anxiously he thought of Heinz and Kätterle, the more pleasure it afforded him to talk about them and to discuss with Eva what could have befallen both.

It was impossible—Biberli believed this as firmly as his nurse—that Heinz could coldly forget his follower or Kätterle neglect what she had undertaken. So both agreed in the conjecture that the messengers sent by the absent ones had been prevented from reaching their destination.

The supposition was correct. Two troopers despatched by Heinz had been captured by the Siebenburgs, and the maid's messenger had cheated her by pocketing the small fee which she paid him and performing another commission instead of going to Schweinau. Of the knight's letters which had fallen into the wrong hands, one had besought the Emperor Rudolph to pardon the loyal servant, the other had thanked Biberli, and informed him that his master remembered and was working for him.

Kätterle had reached Heinz, had been required to tell him everything she knew about Eva and Biberli down to the minutest detail, and had then

been commissioned to repeat to the latter what had been also contained in the letter. On the way home, however, she only reached Schwabach, for the long walk in the most terrible anxiety, drenched by a pouring rain, whilst enquiring her way to Heinz, and especially the terrible excitements of the last few days, had been too much even for her vigorous constitution. Her pulse was throbbing violently and her brow was burning when she knocked at the door of Apel, the carrier, who had taken her into his waggon at Schweinau, and the good old man and his wife received and nursed her. The fever was soon broken, but weakness prevented her journeying to Schweinau on foot, and, as Apel intended to go to Nuremberg the first of the following week, she had been forced to content herself with sending the messenger who had betrayed her confidence.

How hard it was for Kätterle to wait! And her impatience reached its height when, before she could leave, some of the imperial troopers stabled their horses at the carrier's and reported that Castle Siebenburg and the robber stronghold of the Absbachs were destroyed. Sir Heinz Schorlin had fought like St. George. Now he was detained only by the fortresses of the knights Hirschhorn and Oberstein, whose situation on inaccessible crags threatened long to defy the imperial power.

The thought that the strong Swiss girl might be ill never entered the mind of Biberli or Eva,

but in quiet hours he asked himself which it would probably grieve him most to miss forever—his beautiful young nurse or his countrywoman and sweetheart. His heart belonged solely to Kätterle, but towards Eva he obeyed the old trait inherent in his nature, and clung with the same loyalty hitherto evinced for his master to her whom he now regarded as his future mistress.

This she must and should be, because already life seemed to him no longer desirable without her voice. Never had he heard one whose pure tones penetrated the heart more deeply. And had Heinz been permitted to hear her talk with the Dominicans, he would have given up his wish to renounce the world and, instead of entering a monastery, striven with every power of his being to win this wonderful maiden, for whom his heart glowed with such ardent love. When she persisted in her refusal to take the veil because she had learned that it is possible in the world to live at peace with one's self, feel in harmony with God, and follow in love and fidelity the footsteps of the Saviour, she had heard many a kindly word of admonition, many a sharp reproof, and many a fierce threat from the Dominicans, but she did not allow herself to be led astray, and understood how to defend herself so cleverly and forcibly that his heart dilated, and he asked himself how a girl of eighteen could maintain her ground so firmly, so shrewdly, and with such thorough knowledge of

the Scriptures, against devout, highly educated men—nay, the most learned and austere.

The Abbess Kunigunde had also appeared sometimes at his bedside, and Eva's conversations with her revealed to him that she had obtained her armour against the Dominicans from the Sisters of St. Clare. True, at first the former had laboured with the utmost earnestness to win her back to the convent, but two days before she had met two Dominicans, and the evident efforts of one who seemed to hold a distinguished position among his brother monks to gain Eva for his own order and withdraw her from the Sisters of St. Clare, whom he believed to be walking in paths less pleasing to God, had so angered the abbess that she lost the power, and perhaps also the will, to maintain her usual composure. Therefore, yesterday she had opposed her niece's wish to remain in the world less strongly than before; nay, on parting with her she had clasped her in her arms and, as it were, restored her freedom by admitting that various paths led to the kingdom of heaven.

This was balm to the convalescent's wounds; for he cherished no wish more ardent than to accompany his master to the marriage altar, where Eva would give her hand to Heinz Schorlin as her faithful husband, and the abbess's last visit seemed to favour this desire. Besides, he who had gazed at life with open eyes had never yet beheld a brave young warrior, soon after reaping well-earned re-

renown, yearn for the monk's cowl. Doubt, suffering, and a miraculous escape from terrible peril had inspired the joyous-hearted Heinz with the desire to renounce the world. Now, perhaps, Heaven itself was showing him that he had not received the boon of life to bury himself in a monastery, but to be blessed with the fairest and noblest of gifts, the love of a woman who, in his opinion, had not her equal beneath the wide vault of the azure sky.

Countess Cordula was not suited for his master. During the long hours that he lay quietly on his pallet a hundred reasons strengthened this opinion. The man for whom he had steadfastly endured such severe agony, and was suffering still, was worthy of a more beautiful, devout, and calm companion—nay, the very loveliest and best—and that, in his eyes, was the girl for whom Heinz had felt so overmastering a passion just before his luckless winnings at the gaming table. This potent fire of love might doubtless be smothered with sand and ashes, but never extinguished.

Such were Biberli's thoughts as he recalled the events of the previous day. He had found Eva less equable in her tender management than usual. Some anxiety concerning something apart from her patients seemed to oppress her. True, she had not wished to reveal it, but his eyes were keen.

Soon after sunrise that morning she had carefully rebandaged his crushed thumb, which was

not yet healed. Then she had gone away, as she assured him, for only a few hours. Now the sun was already high in the heavens, yet she did not return, though it was long past the time for the bandages to be renewed, and the drops to be given which sustained the life of the dying Minorite in the adjoining room. It made him uneasy, and when anxiety had once taken root in his heart it sent its shoots forward and backward, and he remembered many things in which Eva had been different the day before. Why had she whispered so long with Herr Pfinzing and then looked so sorrowfully at him, Biberli? Why had Frau Christine come not less than three times yesterday afternoon, and again in the evening? She had some secret to discuss with the surgeon Otto. Had any change taken place in his condition? and did the leech intend to amputate his thumb, or even his hand? But, no! only yesterday he had been assured that he could save all five fingers, and his sorely mangled left foot too. The widow was better, and all hope of saving the Minorite's life had been relinquished two days ago. Eva's anxiety must have some other cause, and he asked himself, in alarm, whether she could have received any bad news from his master or Kätterle?

A terrible sense of uneasiness overpowered him, and the necessity of confiding it to some one took such possession of the loquacious man that he called little Walpurga from the next room. But

instead of running to his bedside, she darted forward with the joyful cry, "She is coming!" towards the door and Eva.

Soon after the latter, leading the child by the hand, entered the room. Biberli felt as if the sun were rising again. How gay her greeting sounded! The expression of her blue eyes seemed to announce something pleasant. Whoever possessed this maiden would be sure to have no lack of light in his home, no matter how dark the night might be.

He must have been mistaken concerning the anxiety which had seemed to oppress her on his account. Instead of bad news, she was surely bringing good tidings. Nay, she had the best of all; for Kätterle, Eva told him, would soon arrive. But his future wife had been ill too. Her cheeks had not yet regained their roundness or their bright colour.

Sharp-sighted Biberli noticed this, and exclaimed: "Then she is here already! For, my mistress, how else could you know how her cheeks look?"

Soon afterwards the maid was really standing beside her lover's couch.

Eva allowed them to enjoy the happiness of meeting undisturbed, and went to her other two patients. When she returned to the couple, Kätterle had already related what she had experienced in Schwabach. It was little more

than Eva had already heard from her uncle and others.

That Seitz Siebenburg, whom he bitterly hated, had fallen in a sword combat by his master's own hand, afforded Biberli the keenest delight. No portion of the narrative vexed him except the non-arrival of the messengers, and the probability that some time must yet elapse ere Heinz could sheathe his sword.

Eva's cheeks flushed with joy and pride as she heard how nobly her lover had justified the confidence of his imperial patron. But it seemed to be impossible to follow Biberli's flood of eloquence to the end. She was in haste, and he had been right concerning the cares which oppressed her.

She had stood beside his couch the day before with a heavy heart, and it required the exercise of all her strength to conceal the anxiety with which her mind was filled, for if she did not intercede for him that very day; if his pardon could not be announced early the following morning during the session of the court in the Town Hall, then the half-recovered man must be surrendered to the judges again, and Otto believed that the torture would be fatal to his enfeebled frame.

The tailor and his adherents, as Eva knew from Herr Pfinzing, were making every effort to obtain his condemnation and prove to the city that they had not censured the proceedings of the Ortlieb

household as mere reckless slanderers. Eva and her sister would be again mentioned in the investigation, and were even threatened with an examination.

At first this had startled her, but she believed her uncle's assurance that this examination would fully prove her innocence before the eyes of the whole world. For her own sake Eva surely would not have suffered herself to be so tortured by anxiety night and day, or undertaken and resolved to dare so much. The thought that the faithful follower whom her patient nursing had saved from death and to whom she had become warmly attached must now lose his life, and Heinz Schorlin be robbed of the possibility of doing anything for him, had cast every other fear in the shade, and had kept her constantly in motion the evening before and this morning.

But all that she and her Aunt Christine had attempted in behalf of the imperilled man had been futile. To apply to the Emperor again every one, including the magistrate, had declared useless, since even the Burgrave had been refused.

The members of the Council and the judges in the court had already, at Aunt Christine's solicitation, deferred the proceedings four days, but the law now forbade longer delay. Though individuals would gladly have spared the accused the torture, its application could scarcely be avoided, for how many accusers and witnesses appeared

against him, and if there were weighty depositions and by no means truthful replies on the part of the prisoner, the torture could not be escaped. It legally belonged to the progress of the investigation, and how many who had by no means recovered from the last exposure to the rack were constantly obliged to enter the torture chamber? Besides, the judges would be charged with partiality by the tailor and his followers, and to show such visible tokens of favour threatened to prejudice the dignity of the court.

She had found good will everywhere, but all had withheld any positive promise. It was so easy to retreat behind the high-sounding words "justice and law," and then: who for the sake of a squire—who, moreover, was in the service of a foreign knight—would awaken the righteous indignation of the artisans, who made the tailor's cause their own.

Whatever the aunt and niece tried had failed either wholly or partially. Besides, Eva had been obliged to keep in the background in order not to expose herself to the suspicion of pleading her own cause. Many probably thought that Frau Christine herself was talking ostensibly in behalf of the servant and really for her brother's slandered daughter.

When Eva met Kätterle in front of the hospital, she had passed without noticing her, so completely had sorrow, anxiety, and the effort to think of some expedient engrossed her attention.

It had been very difficult to meet Biberli with an untroubled manner, yet she had even succeeded in showing a bright face to the carrier's widow, as well as to Father Benedictus, whose hours seemed to be numbered, and who only yesterday had wounded her deeply.

When she returned from the Minorite's room to Biberli's the lovers were no longer alone. The fresh, pleasant face of a vigorous woman, who had already visited the sufferer several times, greeted her beside his couch.

When, in the exchange of salutations, her eyes met Eva's the latter suddenly found the plan of action she had vainly sought. Gertrude of Berne could help her take the chance which, in the last extremity, she meant to risk, for she was the wife of the Swiss warder in the Burgrave's castle. It certainly would not be difficult for her to procure her an interview with the Burgravine Elizabeth. If the noble lady could not aid herself, she could—her cheeks paled at the thought, yet she resolutely clung to it—present her to her brother, the Emperor.

When Eva, in a low tone, told Frau Gertrude what she hoped to accomplish at the castle, she learned that the Emperor had ridden with the Archduchess Agnes and a numerous train to the imperial forest, to show his Bohemian daughter-in-law the beekeeper's hives, and would scarcely return before sunset; but the Burgravine had

remained at home on account of a slight illness.

Nevertheless Eva wished to go to the castle, and, whatever reception the noble lady bestowed upon her, she would return to Schweinau as soon as possible. Father Benedictus was so ill that she could not remain away from him long.

If the Burgravine could do nothing for Biberli, she would undertake the risk which made her tremble, because it compelled her, the young girl, to appear alone at the court with all its watchful eyes and sharp tongues. She would go to the fortress to beseech the Emperor herself for pardon.

She could act with entire freedom to-day, for her uncle had ridden to the city and, Frau Gertrude said, was one of the party who accompanied the Emperor to the beekeeper's, whilst her aunt had just gone to Nuremberg to see Els, who had besought her, in a despairing letter, to let her come to Schweinau, for her power of endurance was exhausted.

How gladly Eva would have accompanied her aunt to her sister to exhort her to take courage! What a strange transformation of affairs! Ever since she could think Els had sustained her by her superior strength and perseverance. Now she was to be the stronger, and teach her to exercise patience.

She thought she had gained the right to do so. Whilst Eva was still explaining her plan to Frau

Gertrude, she herself perceived that she had taken no account of time.

It was nearly noon, and if she ordered a sedan-chair to convey her to the city and back again to Schweinau, it would be too late to approach the Emperor as a petitioner. She could fulfil her design only by riding; but the warder's wife reminded her that it would be contrary to custom—nay, scarcely possible—to appear before the Emperor, or even his sister, in a riding habit.

But the young girl speedily found a way to fulfil her ardent wish to aid. On her swift palfrey, which her uncle had sent to Schweinau long before that she might refresh herself, after her arduous duties, by a ride, she would go to the city, stop at her own home, and have her new expensive mourning clothes taken to the castle. The only doubt was whether she could change her garments in the quarters of the Swiss, and whether Frau Gertrude would help her do so.

The latter gladly assented. There was no lack of room in her apartments, nor did Frau Gertrude, who had served the Burgravine as waiting maid many years before her marriage, lack either skill or good will.

So she went directly home on her mule; but Eva, after promising her patients to return soon, hastened to her uncle's residence.

There she mounted the palfrey and reached the city gate a long time before the Swiss. The

clothes she needed were soon found in the Ortlieb mansion, and she was then carried in a sedan-chair to the castle with her wardrobe, whilst the groom led her palfrey after her. Countess Cordula was not at home; she, too, had ridden to the forest with the Emperor.

The Burgravine Elizabeth willingly consented to receive the charming child whose fate had awakened her warm interest. She had just been hearing the best and most beautiful things about Eva, for the leech Otto had been called to visit her in her attack of illness, and the old man was overflowing with praises of both sisters. He indignantly mentioned the vile calumnies with which Heinz Schorlin's name was associated, and which base slander had fixed upon the innocent girls whose pure morality he would guarantee.

The great lady, who probably remembered having directed Heinz's attention to Eva at the dance, understood very clearly that they could not fail to attract each other. Of all the knights in her imperial brother's train, none seemed to the Burgravine more worthy of her favour than her gay young countryman, whose mother had been one of the friends of her youth. She would gladly have rendered him a service and, in this case, not only for his own sake but still more on account of the rare fidelity of his servant, who was also a native of her beloved Swiss mountains. Yet, notwithstanding all this, it seemed impossible to bring

this matter again before the Emperor. She knew her husband, and after the rebuff he had received on account of the tortured man he would be angry if she should plead his cause with her royal brother.

But her kind heart, and the regard which both Eva and Heinz Schorlin had inspired, strengthened her desire to aid, as far as lay in her power, the brave maiden who urged her suit with such honest warmth, and the petitioner's avowal of her intention, as a last resort, of appealing to the Emperor in person showed her how to convert her kind wishes into deeds.

Let Eva's youth and beauty try to persuade the Emperor to an act of clemency which he had refused to wisdom and power.

After supper her brother received various guests, and she could present the daughter of a Nuremberg patrician whom he already knew, and whose rare charms had attracted his notice.

Though she had been compelled to forego the ride to the forest, she was well enough to appear at supper in the Emperor's residence, which was close to her own castle. When the meal was over she would take Eva herself to her royal brother.

She told her this, and the gratitude which she received was so warm and earnest that it touched her heart, and as she bade the beautiful, brave child farewell she clasped her in her arms and kissed her.

CHAPTER XVI.

Encouraged and hopeful, Eva again mounted her palfrey, and urged the swift animal outside the city to so rapid a pace that the old groom on his well-fed bay was left far behind. But the change of dress, the waiting, and the numerous questions asked by the Burgravine had consumed so much time that the poplars were already casting long shadows when she dismounted before the hospital.

Sister Hildegard received her with an embarrassment by no means usual, but which Eva thought natural when the former told her that the dying Father Benedictus had asked for her impatiently. The widow was doing well, and Biberli would hardly need her; for the wife of a Swabian knight in whose service he had formerly been was sitting by his couch with her young daughter, and their visit seemed to please him.

Eva remarked in surprise that she thought the sick man had never served any one except the Schorlins, but she was in too much haste for further questions, and entered the room where Biberli lay.

Her face was flushed by the rapid ride; her thick, fair hair, which usually fell loosely on her shoulders, had been hastily braided before she mounted her horse, but the long, heavy braids had become unfastened on the way, and now hung in tresses round her face and pliant figure.

She waved her hand gaily from the threshold to the patient for whom she had done and dared so much; but ere approaching his couch she modestly saluted the stately matron who was with Biberli, and nodded a pleasant welcome to her daughter, whose pretty, frank face attracted her. After the Swabians had cordially returned her greeting, she briefly excused herself, as an urgent duty would not permit her to yield to her desire to remain with them.

Lastly, she addressed a few hasty questions to the squire about his health, kissed little Walpurga, who had nestled to her side, bade her tell her mother that she would come to her later, and entered the next room.

"Well?" Biberli asked his visitors eagerly, after the door had closed behind her.

"Oh, how beautiful she is!" cried the younger lady quickly, but her mother's voice trembled with deep emotion as she answered: "How I objected to my son's marriage with the daughter of a city family! Nay, I intended to cast all the weight of my maternal influence between Heinz and the Nuremberg maiden. Yet you did not say too much,

my friend, and what your praise began Eva's own appearance has finished. She will be welcome to me as a daughter. I have scarcely ever seen anything more lovely. That she is devout and charitable and, moreover, has a clear intellect and resolute energy, can be plainly perceived in spite of the few minutes which she could spare us. If Heaven would really suffer our Heinz to win the heart of this rare creature——"

"Every fibre of it is his already," interrupted Biberli. "The rub—pardon me, noble lady!—is somewhere else. Whether he—whether Heinz can be induced to renounce the thought of the monastery, is the question."

He sighed faintly as he gazed into the still beautiful, strong, and yet kindly face of the Lady Wendula Schorlin, Sir Heinz's mother, for she was the older visitor.

"We ought not to doubt that," replied the matron firmly. "As the last of his ancient race, it is his duty to provide for its continuance, not solely for his own salvation. He was always a dutiful son."

"Yet," replied Biberli thoughtfully, "'Away with those who gave us life!' was the exhortation of Father Benedictus in the next room. 'Away with the service of sovereign and woman!' he cried to our knight. 'Away with everything that stands in the way of your own salvation!' And," Biberli added, "St. Francis was not the first to devise

that. Our Lord and Saviour commanded His disciples to leave father and mother and to follow Him."

"Who will prevent his walking in the paths of Jesus Christ?" replied the Lady Wendula? "Yet, though he follows His footsteps, he must and can do so as a scion of a noble race, as a knight and the brave soldier and true servant of his Emperor, which he is, as a good son and, God willing, as a husband and father. He is sure of my blessing if he wields his sword as a champion of his holy faith. When my two daughters took the veil I submissively yielded. They can pray for heavenly bliss for their brother and ourselves. My only son, the last Schorlin, I neither can nor will permit to renounce the world, in which he has tasks to perform which God Himself assigned him by his birth."

"And how could Heinz part from this angel," cried Maria—to whom, next to her mother, her brother was the dearest person on earth—"if he is really sure of her love!"

She herself had not yet opened her heart to love. To wander through forest and field with the aged head of her family, assist her mother in housekeeping, and nurse the sick poor in the village, had hitherto been the joy and duty of her life. Gaily, often with a song upon her lips, she had carelessly seen one day follow another until Schorlin Castle was besieged and destroyed, and

her dear uncle, the Knight Ramsweg, was slain in the defence of the fortress confided to his care.

Then she and her mother were taken to the convent at Constance. Both remained there in perfect freedom, as welcome guests of the nuns, until the mounted courier brought a letter from the Knight Maier of Silenen, her cousin, who wrote from Nuremberg that Heinz, like his sisters, intended to renounce the world.

Lady Schorlin set out at once, and with an anxious heart rode to Nuremberg with her daughter as fast as possible.

They had arrived a few hours before and gone to their cousin from Silenen. From him the Lady Wendula learned what her maternal love desired to know. Biberli's fate brought her, after a brief rest, to the hospital, and how it comforted the faithful fellow's heart to see the noble lady who had confided his master to his care, and in whose house the T and St had been embroidered on his long coat and cap!

Lady Wendula had remembered these letters, and when she spoke of them he replied that since he had partially verified what the T and St had announced to people concerning his character, and to which the letters had themselves incited him, he no longer needed them.

Then he lapsed into silence, and at last, as the result of his meditations, told his mistress that there was something unusual about his insignifi-

cant self, because he earnestly desired to practise the virtues whose possession he claimed before the eyes of the people. He had usually found the worst wine in the taverns with showy signs, and when the Lady Wendula's daughter had embroidered those letters on the cloth for him, what he furnished the guests was also of very doubtful quality. On his sick bed he had been obliged to place no curb upon his proneness to reflection, and in doing so had discovered that there was no virtue which can be owned like a house or a steed, but that each must be constantly gained anew, often amidst toil and suffering. One thing, however, was now firmly established in his belief: that his favourite virtues were really the fairest of all, because—one will answer for all—man never felt happier than when he had succeeded in keeping his fidelity inviolate and maintaining his steadfastness. He had learned, too, from Fräulein Eva that the Redeemer Himself promised the crown of eternal life to those who remain faithful unto death. In this confidence he awaited the jailers, who perhaps would come very soon to lead him into the most joyless of all apartments—the Nuremberg torture chamber.

Then he told the ladies what he knew of the love which united Heinz and Eva. The four Fs which he had advised his master to heed in his wooing—Family, Figure, Favor, and Fortune—he no longer deemed the right touchtones. Whilst

he was forced to lie idly here he had found that they should rather be exchanged for four Ss—Spirituality, Steadfastness, Stimulation, and Solace—for the eyes and the heart.

All these were united in Eva and, moreover, there could be no objection to the family to which she belonged.

Thereupon he had commenced so enthusiastic a eulogy of his beloved nurse and preserver that more than once Lady Wendula, smiling, stopped him, accusing him of permitting his grateful heart to lead him to such exaggeration that the maiden he wished to serve would scarcely thank him.

Yet Eva's personal appearance had disappointed neither the experienced mother nor the easily won daughter. Nay, when Maria Schorlin gazed at her through the half-open door of the Minorite's room, because she did not want to lose sight of the girl who had already attracted her on account of her hard battle in the cause of love, and who specially charmed her because it was her Heinz whom she loved, she thought no human being could resist the spell which emanated from Eva.

With her finger on her lip she beckoned to her mother, and she, too, could not avert her eyes from the wonderful creature whom she hoped soon to call daughter, as she saw Eva standing, with eyes uplifted to heaven, beside the old man's couch, and heard her, in compliance with his wish, as she had often done before, half recite, half sing in a low

voice the Song of the Sun, the finest work of St. Francis.

The words were in the Italian language, in which this song had flowed from the poet heart of the Saint of Assisi, so rich in love to God and all animate nature; for she had learned to speak Italian in the Convent of St. Clare, to which several Italians had been transferred from their own home and that of their order and its founder.

Lady Wendula and her daughter could also follow the song; for the mother had learned the beautiful language of the Saint of Assisi from the minnesingers in her youth, and in the early years of her marriage had accompanied the Emperor Frederick, with her husband, across the Alps. So she had taught Maria.

As Lady Schorlin approached the door Eva, with her large eyes uplifted, was just beginning the second verse:

"Praised by His creatures all,*
Praised be the Lord my God
By Messer Sun, my brother, above all,
Who by his rays lights us and lights the day.
Radiant is he, with his great splendour stored,
Thy glory, Lord, confessing.

"By sister Moon and stars my Lord is praised,
Where clear and fair they in the heavens are raised.

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* Version given in Mrs. Oliphant's Life of St. Francis of Assisi, which endeavours to reproduce its broken rhymes and faltering measures.—Tr.

"By brother Wind, my Lord, thy praise is said,
By air and clouds, and the blue sky o'erhead,
By which thy creatures all are kept and fed.

"By one most humble, useful, precious, chaste,
By sister Water, O my Lord, thou art praised.

"And praised is my Lord
By brother Fire—he who lights up the night,
Jocund, robust is he, and strong and bright.

"Praised art Thou, my Lord, by mother Earth,
Thou who sustainest her and governest,
And to her flowers, fruit, herbs, dost colour give and birth.

"And praised is my Lord
By those who, for Thy love, can pardon give
And bear the weakness and the wrongs of men.

"Blessed are those who suffer thus in peace,
By Thee, the Highest, to be crowned in heaven.

"Praised by our sister Death, my Lord, art Thou,
From whom no living man escapes.
Who die in mortal sin have mortal woe,
But blessed are they who die doing Thy will;
The second death can strike at them no blow.

"Praises and thanks and blessing to my Master be!
Serve ye Him all, with great humility."

How God was loved by this saint, who beheld in everything the Most High had created kindred whom he loved and held intercourse with as with brother and sister! Whatever the divine Father's love had formed—the sun, the moon and stars, the wood, water and fire, the earth and her fair chil-

dren, the various flowers and plants—he made proclaim, each for itself and all in common, like a mighty chorus, the praise of God. Even death joins in the hymn, and all these sons and daughters of the same exalted Father call to the minds of men the omnipotent, beneficent rule of the Lord. They help mortals to appreciate God's majesty, fill their hearts with gratitude, and summon them to praise His sublimity and greatness. In death, whom the poet also calls his sister, he sees no cruel murderer, because she, too, comes from the Most High. "And what sister," asks the saint, "could more surely rescue the brother from sorrow and suffering?" Whoever, as a child of God, feels like the loving Saint of Assisi, will gratefully suffer death to lead him to union with the Father.

Benedictus had followed the magnificent poem with rapture. At the lines,

> "But blessed are they who die doing Thy will;
> The second death can strike at them no blow,"

he nodded gently, as if sure that the close of his earthly pilgrimage meant nothing to him except the beginning of a new and happy life; but when Eva ended with the command to serve the Lord with great humility, he lowered his eyes to the floor hesitatingly, as if not sure of himself.

But he soon raised them again and fixed them on the young girl. They seemed to ask the question whether this noble hymn did not draw his

nurse also to him who had sung it; whether, in spite of it, she still persisted, with sorrowful blindness, in her refusal to join the Sisters of St. Clare, whom the saintly singer also numbered amongst his followers. Yet he felt too feeble to appeal to her conscience now, as he had often done, and bear the replies with which this highly gifted, peculiar creature, in every conversation his increasing weakness permitted him to share with her, had pressed him hard and sometimes even silenced him.

True, they fought with unequal weapons. Pain and illness paralysed his keen intellect, and difficulty of breathing often checked the eloquent tongue, both of which had served him so readily in his intercourse with Heinz Schorlin. She contended with the most precious goal of youth before her eyes, fresh and healthy in mind and body, conscious, in the midst of the struggle, against doubt and suffering, for what she held dearest of her own vigorous energy, panoplied by the talisman of the last mandate from the lips of her dying mother.

Benedictus, during a long life devoted to the highest aims, had battled enough. He already saw Sister Death upon the threshold, and he wished to depart in peace and reap the reward for so much conflict, pain, and sacrifice. The Lord Himself had broken his weapons. The Minorite Ægidius, his friend and companion in years, must carry on with Eva, Father Ignatius, the most eloquent member

of the order in Nuremberg, with Heinz Schorlin, the work which he, Benedictus, had begun. Though he himself must retire from the battlefield, he was sure that his post would not remain empty.

The chant had placed him in the right mood to take leave of the Brothers, whose arrival Sister Hildegard had just announced.

Since yesterday he had seen the Saviour constantly before his mental vision. Sometimes he imagined that he beheld Him beckoning to him; sometimes that He extended His arms to him; sometimes he even fancied that he heard His voice, or that of St. Francis, and both invited him to approach.

To-day—the leech had admitted it, and he himself felt it by his fevered brow, the failing pulsations of the heart, and the chill in the cold feet, perhaps already dead—he might expect to leave the dust of the world and behold those for whom he longed face to face in a purer light.

He wished to await the end surrounded only by the Brothers, who were fighting the same battle, reminded by nothing of the world, as if in the outer court of heaven.

Eva, the beautiful yet perverse woman, was one of the last persons whom he would have desired to have near him when he took the step into the other world.

Speech was difficult. A brief admonition to renounce her earthly love in order to share the

divine one whose rich joys he hoped to taste that very day was the farewell greeting he vouchsafed Eva. When she tried to kiss his hand he withdrew it as quickly as his weakness permitted.

Then she retired, and Father Ægidius led the Brothers of the order in Nuremberg into the room. Meanwhile it had grown dark, and the Beguine Paulina brought in a two-branched candelabrum with burning candles. Eva took it from her hand and placed it so that the light should not dazzle her patient; but he saw her and, by pointing with a frowning brow to the door, commanded her to leave the room.

She gladly obeyed. When she had passed the Brothers, however, she paused on the threshold before going into the entry and again gazed at the old man's noble, pallid features illumined by the candlelight.

She had never seen him look so. He was gazing, radiant with joy, at the monks, who were to give him the benediction at his departure. Then he raised his dark eyes as if transfigured; he was thanking Heaven for so much mercy, but the other Minorites fell on their knees beside the bed and prayed with him.

How lovingly the old man looked into each face! He had never favoured her with such a glance. Yet no other nursing had been so difficult and often so painful. At first he had shown a positive enmity to her, and even asked Sister Hilde-

gard for another nurse; but no suitable substitute for Eva could be found. Then he had earnestly desired to be removed to the Franciscan monastery in Nuremberg; this, however, could not be done because it would have hastened his death. So he was forced to remain, and Eva felt that her presence was not the least thing which rendered the hospital distasteful.

Yet, as his aged eyes refused their service and he liked to have some one read aloud from the gospels which he carried with him, or from notes written by his own hand, which also comprised some of the poems of St. Francis, and no one else in the house was capable of performing this office, he at last explicitly desired to keep her for his nurse.

To anoint and bandage, according to the physician's prescription, his sore feet and the deep scars made on his back by severe scourging, which had reopened, became more difficult the more plainly he showed his aversion to her touch, because she—he had told her so himself—was a woman. She certainly had not found it easy to keep awake and wear a pleasant expression when, after a toilsome day, he woke her at midnight and forced her to read aloud until the grey dawn of morning. But hardest of all for Eva to bear were the bitter words with which he wounded her, and which sounded specially sharp and hostile when he reproached her for standing between Heinz

Schorlin and the eternal salvation for which the knight so eagerly longed. He seemed to bear her a grudge like that which the artist feels towards the culprit who has destroyed one of his masterpieces.

Often, too, a chance word betrayed that he blamed Heaven for having denied him victory in the battle for the soul of Heinz Schorlin which he had begun to wage in its name. True, such murmuring was always followed by deep repentance. But in every mood he still strove to persuade Eva to renounce the world.

When she confessed what withheld her from doing so, he at first tried to convince her by opposing reasons, but usually strength to continue the interchange of thought soon failed him. Then he confined himself to condemning with harsh words herper verse spirit and worldly nature, and threatening her with the vengeance of Heaven.

Once, after repeating the Song of the Sun, as she had done just now, he asked whether she, too, felt that nothing save the peace of the cloister would afford the possibility of feeling the greatness and love of the Most High as warmly and fully as this majestic song commands us to do.

Then, summoning her courage, she assured him of the contrary. Though but a simple girl, she, who had often been the guest of the abbess, felt the grandeur and glory of God as much more deeply in the world and during the fulfilment of

the hardest duties which life imposed than with the Sisters of St. Clare, as the forests and fields were wider than the little convent garden.

The old man, in a rage, upbraided her with being a blinded fool, and asked her whether she did not know that the world was finite and limited, whilst what the convent contained was eternal and boundless.

Another time he had wounded her so deeply by his severity that she had found it impossible to restrain her tears. But he had scarcely perceived this ere he repented his harshness. Nothing but love ought to move his heart on the eve of a union with Him whom he had just called Love itself, and with earnest and tender entreaties he besought Eva to forgive him for the censure which was also a work of love. Throughout the day he had treated her with affectionate, almost humble, kindness.

All these things returned to Eva's thoughts as she left her grey-haired patient.

He was standing on the threshold of the other world, and it was easy for her to think of him kindly, deeply as he had often wounded her. Nay, her heart swelled with grateful joy because she had been so patient and suffered nothing to divert her from the arduous duty which she had undertaken in nursing the old man, who regarded her with such disfavour.

A light had been brought into Biberli's room

too. When Eva entered with glowing cheeks she found the Swabians still sitting beside his couch. The door leading into the chamber of the dying man had been closed long before, yet the notes of pious litanies came from the adjoining room. Lady Schorlin noticed her deep emotion with sympathy, and asked her to sit down by her side. Maria offered her own low stool, but Eva declined its use, because she would soon be obliged to ride back to the city. She pressed her hand upon her burning brow, sighing, "Now, now—after such an hour, at court!"

Lady Wendula urged her with such kindly maternal solicitude to take a little rest that the young girl yielded.

The matron's remark that she, too, was invited to the reception at the imperial residence that evening brought an earnest entreaty from Eva to accept the invitation for her sake, and the Swabian promised to gratify her if nothing occurred to prevent. At any rate, they would ride to the city together.

Biberli's astonished enquiry concerning the cause of Eva's visit to the fortress was answered evasively, and she was glad when the singing in the next room led the Swabian to ask whether it was true that the master of her suffering friend on the couch, who intended to devote himself to a monastic life, meant to enter the order of the Minorite whom she had just left and become a

mendicant friar. When Eva assented, the lady remarked that members of this brotherhood had rarely come to her castle; but Biberli said that they were quiet, devout men who, content with the alms they begged, preached, and performed other religious duties. They were recruited more from the people than from the aristocratic classes. Many, however, joined them in order to live an idle life, supported by the gifts of others.

Eva eagerly opposed this view, maintaining that true piety could be most surely found in the order of St. Francis. Then, with warm enthusiasm, she praised its founder, asserting that, on the contrary, the Saint of Assisi had enjoined labour upon his followers. For instance, one of his favourite disciples was willing to shake the nuts from the rotten branches of a nut tree which no one dared to climb if he might have half the harvest. This was granted, but he made a sack of his wide brown cowl, filled it with the nuts, and distributed them amongst his poor.

This pleased the mother and daughter; yet when the former remarked that work of this kind seemed to her too easy for a young, noble, and powerful knight, Eva agreed, but added that the saint also required an activity in which the hands, it is true, remained idle, but which heavily taxed even the strongest soul. St. Francis himself had set the example of performing this toil cheerfully and gladly.

Whilst giving this information she had again risen. Sister Hildegard had announced that her palfrey and the horses of the guests had been led up.

Finally Eva promised to mount at the same time as the Swabians, bade farewell to Biberli, who looked after her with surprise, yet silently conjectured that this errand to the Emperor was in his behalf, and then went into the entry, where Sister Hildegard told her that Father Benedictus had just died.

The monks were still chanting beside his deathbed. Brother Ægidius, the friend and comrade of the dead man, however, had left them and approached Eva.

Deeply agitated, he struggled to repress his sobs as he told her that the old man's longing was fulfilled and his Saviour had summoned him. To die thus, richly outweighed the many sacrifices he had so willingly made here below during a long life. If Eva had witnessed his death she would have perceived the aptness of the saying that a monk's life is bitter, but his death is sweet. Such an end was granted only to those who cast the world aside. Let her consider this once more, ere she renounced the eternal bliss for which formerly she had so devoutly yearned.

Eva's only answer was the expression of her grief for his friend's decease. But whilst passing out into the darkness she thought: the holy Brother

certainly had a beautiful and happy death, yet how gently, trusting in the mercy of her Redeemer, my mother also passed away, though during her life and on her deathbed she remained in the world. And then—whilst Father Benedictus was closing his eyes—what concern did he probably have for aught save his own salvation, but my mother forgot herself and thought only of others, of those whom she loved, whilst the Saviour summoned her to Himself. Her eyes were already dim and her tongue faltered when she uttered the words which had guided her daughter until now. The forge fire of life burns fiercely, yet to it my gratitude is due if the resolutions I formed in the forest after I had gathered the flowers for her and saw Heinz kneeling in prayer have not been vain, but have changed the capricious, selfish child into a woman who can render some service to others.

If Heinz comes now and seeks me, I think I can say trustingly, "Here I am!" We have both striven for the divine Love and recognised its glorious beauty. If later, hand in hand, we can interweave it with the earthly one, why should it not be acceptable to the Saviour? If Heinz offers me his affection I will greet it as "Sister Love," and it will certainly summon me with no lower voice to praise the Father from whom it comes and who has bestowed it upon me, as do the sun, the moon and stars, the fire and water.

Whilst speaking she went out, and after learning

that Frau Christine and her husband had not yet returned, she rode with the Swabians towards the city.

In order not to pass through the whole length of Nuremberg, Eva guided her friends around the fortifications. Their destination was almost the same, and they chose to enter at the Thiergärtnerthor, which was in the northwestern part of the city, under the hill crowned by the castle, whilst the road to Schweinau usually led through the Spitalthor.

On the way Lady Wendula induced Eva to tell her many things about herself, urging her to describe her father and her dead mother. Her daughter Maria, on the other hand, was most interested in her sister Els, who, as she had heard from Biberli, was the second beautiful E.

Eva liked to talk about her relatives, but her depression continued and she spoke only in reply to questions, for the Minorite's death had affected her, and her heart throbbed anxiously when she thought of the moment that she must appear amongst the courtiers and see the Emperor.

Would her errand be vain? Must poor Biberli pay for his resolute fidelity with his life? What pain it would cause her, and how heavily it would burden his master's soul that he had failed to intercede for him!

Not until Lady Schorlin questioned her did Eva confess what troubled her, and how she dread-

ed the venture which she had undertaken on her own responsibility.

They were obliged to wait outside the Thiergärtnerthor, for it had just been opened to admit a train of freight waggons.

Whilst Eva remained on the high-road, with the castle before her eyes, she sighed from the depths of her troubled heart: "Why should the Emperor Rudolph grant me, an insignificant girl, what he refused his sister's husband, the powerful Burgrave, to whom he is so greatly indebted? Oh, suppose he should treat me harshly and bid me go back to my spinning wheel!"

Then she felt the arm of the dignified lady at her side pass round her and heard her say: "Cheer up, my dear girl. The blessing of a woman who feels as kindly towards you as to her own daughter will accompany you, and no Emperor will ungraciously rebuff you, you lovely, loyal, charitable child."

At these words from her kind friend Eva's heart opened as if the dear mother whom death had snatched from her had inspired her with fresh courage, and from the very depths of her soul rose the cry, "Oh, how I thank you!"

She urged her nimble palfrey nearer the lady's horse to kiss her left hand, which held the bridle, but Lady Wendula would not permit it and, drawing her towards her, exclaimed, "Your lips, dear one," and as her red mouth pressed the kind lady's,

Eva felt as if the caress had sealed an old and faithful friendship. But this was not all. Maria also wished to show the affection she had won, and begged for a kiss too.

Without suspecting it, Eva, on the way to an enterprise she dreaded, received the proof that her lover's dearest relatives welcomed her with their whole hearts as a new member of the family.

On the other side of the gate she was obliged to part from the Swabians.

Lady Wendula bade her farewell with an affectionate "until we meet again," and promised positively to go to the reception at the castle.

Eva uttered a sigh of relief. It seemed like an omen of success that this lady, who had so quickly inspired her with such perfect confidence, was to witness her difficult undertaking. She felt like a leader who takes the field with a scanty band of soldiers and is unexpectedly joined by the troops of a firm friend.

CHAPTER XVII.

When Arnold, the warder from Berne, helped Eva from the saddle, a blaze of light greeted her from the imperial residence. The banquet was just beginning.

Frau Gertrude had more than one piece of good news to tell while assisting the young girl. Among the sovereign's guests was her uncle the magistrate, who had accompanied the Emperor to the beekeeper's, and with his wife, whom she would also find there, had been invited to the banquet. Besides—this, as the best, she told her last—her father, Herr Ernst Ortlieb, had returned from Ulm and Augsburg, and a short time before had come to the fortress to conduct Jungfrau Els, by the Burgrave's gracious permission, to her betrothed husband's hiding place. Frau Gertrude had lighted her way, and a long separation might be borne for such a meeting.

The ex-maid was obliged to bestir herself that Eva might have a few minutes for her sister and Wolff, yet she would fain have spent a much longer time over the long, thick, fair hair, which

with increasing pleasure she combed until it flowed in beautiful waving tresses over the rich Florentine stuff of her plain white mourning robe.

The Swiss had also provided white roses from the Burgrave's garden to fasten at the square neck of Eva's dress. The latter permitted her to do this, but her wish to put a wreath of roses on the young girl's head, according to the fashion of the day, was denied, because Eva thought it more seemly to appear unadorned, and not as if decked for a festival when she approached the Emperor as a petitioner. The woman whose life had been spent at court perceived the wisdom of this idea, and at last rejoiced that she had not obtained her wish; for when her work was finished Eva looked so bewitching and yet so pure and modest, that nothing could be removed or—even were it the wreath of roses—added without injuring the perfect success of her masterpiece.

Lack of time soon compelled the young girl to interrupt the exclamations of admiration uttered by the skilful tiring woman herself, her little daughter, the maidservant, and the friend whom Frau Gertrude had invited to come in as if by accident.

While following the warder's wife through various corridors and rooms, Eva thought of the hour in her own home before the dance at the Town Hall, and it seemed as if not days but a whole life intervened, and she was a different per-

son, a complete contrast in most respects to the Eva of that time.

Before the dance she had secretly rejoiced in the applause elicited by her appearance; now she was indifferent to it—nay, the more eagerly the spectators expressed their delight the more she grieved that the only person whom she desired to please was not among them.

How easy it had been to be led to the dance, and how hard was the errand awaiting her! Her heart shrank before the doubt awakened by the flood of light pouring from the windows of the imperial residence; the doubt whether her lover would not avoid her if—ah, had it only been possible!—if he should meet her among the guests yonder; whether the eloquent Father Ignatius, who had followed him, might not already have won from the knight a vow compelling him to turn from her and summon all his strength of will to forget her.

But, no! He could no more renounce his love than she hers. She would not, dare not, let such terrible thoughts torture her now.

Heinz was far away, and the fate of her love would be decided later. The cause of her presence here was something very different, and the conviction that it was good, right, and certain of his approval, dispelled the pain that had overpowered her, and raised her courage.

Unspeakably hard trials lay behind her, and

harder ones must, perhaps, yet be vanquished. But she no longer needed to fear them, for she felt that the strength which had awakened within her after she became conscious of her love was still sustaining and directing her, and would enable her to govern matters which she could not help believing that she herself would be too weak to guide to their goal. She felt freed from her former wavering and hesitation, and as formerly in the modest house of the Beguines, now in the stately citadel she realised that, in sorrow and severe trial, she had learned to assert her position in life by her own strength. Her father, whom she was to meet presently, would find little outward change in her, but when he had perceived the transformation wrought in the character of his helpless "little saint" it would please him to hear from her how wonderfully her mother's last prophetic words were being fulfilled.

She was emerging from the forge fire of life, steeled for every conflict, yet those would be wrong who believed that, trusting to her own newly won strength, she had forgotten to look heavenward. On the contrary, never had she felt nearer to her God, her Saviour, and the gracious Virgin. Without them she could accomplish nothing, yet for the first time she had undertaken tasks and sought to win goals which were worthy of beseeching them for aid. Love had taught her to be faithful in worldly life, and she said to her-

self, "Better, far better I can certainly become; but firmer faith cannot be kept."

Wolff's hiding place was a large, airy room, affording a view of the Frank country, with its meadows, fields, and forests. Eva saw there by the light of the blazing pine chips her father, sister, and brother-in-law.

Yet the meeting between all these beloved ones after a long separation partook more of sorrow than of joy. Els had really resolved to leave the Eysvogel mansion, yet she met her Aunt Christine with the joyful cry: "I shall stay! Wolff's father and I have become good friends."

In fact, a few hours before Herr Casper had looked at her kindly and gratefully, and when she showed him how happy this rendered her, warmly entreated her in a broken voice not to leave him. She had proved herself to be his good angel, and the sight of her was the only bright spot in his clouded life. Then she had gladly promised to stay, and intended to keep her word. She had only accompanied her father, who had unexpectedly returned for a short time, because she could trust the nun who shared her nursing of the paralysed patient, and he rarely recognised his watcher at night.

How long Els had been separated from her lover! When Eva greeted the reunited pair they had already poured forth to each other the events which had driven them to the verge of despair, and

which now once more permitted them with budding hope to anticipate new happiness.

Eva had little time, yet the sisters found an opportunity to confide many things to each other, though at first their father often interrupted them by opposing his younger daughter's intention of going to the Emperor as a supplicant.

The girl whose wishes but a short time ago he had refused or gratified, according to the mood of the moment, like those of a child, had since gained, even in his eyes, so well founded a claim to respect, she opposed him in her courteous, modest way with such definiteness of purpose, Biberli's fate interested him so much, and the prospect of seeing his daughters brought before the court was so painful, that he admitted the force of Eva's reasons and let her set forth on her difficult mission accompanied by his good wishes.

Els had dropped her maternal manner; nay, she received her sister as her superior, and began to describe her work in the hospital to Wolff in such vivid colours that Eva laid her hand on her lips and hurried out of the room with the exclamation, "If you insist upon our changing places, we will stand in future side by side and shoulder to shoulder! Farewell till after the battle!"

She could not have given much more time to her relatives under any circumstances, for the Burgravine's maid of honour who was to attend her to the reception was already waiting somewhat

impatiently in Frau Gertrude's room, and took her to the castle without delay.

The place where they were to stay was the large apartment adjoining the dining hall.

The confidence which Eva had regained on her way to her relatives vanished only too quickly in the neighbourhood of the sovereign and the sight of the formal reception bestowed on all who entered. Her heart throbbed more and more anxiously as she realised for the first time how serious a step she had taken; nay, it was long ere she succeeded in calming herself sufficiently to notice the clatter of the metal vessels and the Emperor's deep voice, which often drowned the lower tones of the guests. Reverence for royalty was apparent everywhere.

How much quieter this banquet was than those of the princes and nobles! The guests knew that the Emperor Rudolph disliked the boisterous manners of the German nobility. Besides, the sovereign's mourning exerted a restraint upon mirth and recklessness. All avoided loud laughter, though the monarch was fond of gaiety and heroically concealed the deep grief of his own soul.

When the lord high steward announced to the maid of honour who had brought Eva here that dessert was served, the latter believed that the dreaded moment when she would be presented to the Emperor was close at hand, but quarter of an hour after quarter of an hour passed and she still

heard the clanking of metal and the voices of the guests, which now began to grow louder, and amidst which she sometimes distinguished the strident tones of the court fool, Eyebolt, and the high ones of the Countess Cordula.

Time moved at a snail's pace, and she already fancied her heart could no longer endure its violent throbbing, when at last—at last—the heavy oak chairs were pushed noisily back over the stone floor of the dining hall.

From the balcony of the audience chamber a flourish of trumpets echoed loudly along the arches of the lofty, vaulted ceiling of the apartment, and the Emperor, leading the company, crossed the threshold attended by several dignitaries, the court jesters, and some pages.

His august sister, the Burgravine Elizabeth, leaned on his arm. The papal ambassador, Doria, in the brilliant robe of a cardinal, followed, escorting the Duchess Agnes, but he parted from her in the hall. Among many other secular and ecclesiastical princes and dignitaries appeared also Count von Montfort and his daughter, the old First Losunger of Nuremberg, Berthold Vorchtel, and Herr Pfinzing with his wife.

Several guests from the city entered at the same time through another door, among whom, robed in handsome festal garments, were Eva's new Swabian acquaintances. How gladly she would have hastened to them! But a grey-haired stately

man of portly figure, whose fur-trimmed cloak hung to his ankles—Sir Arnold Maier of Silenen, led them to a part of the hall very distant from where she was standing.

To make amends, Count von Montfort and Cordula came very near her; but she could not greet them. Each person—she felt it—must remain in his or her place. And the restraint became stronger as the Duchess Agnes, giving one guest a nod, another a few words, advanced nearer and nearer, pausing at last beside Count von Montfort.

The old huntsman advanced respectfully towards the Bohemian princess, and Eva heard the fourteen-year-old wife ask, "Well, Count, how fares your wish to find the right husband for your wilful daughter?"

"Of course it must be fulfilled, Duchess, since your Highness deigned to approve it," he answered, with his hand upon his heart.

"And may his name be known?" she queried with evident eagerness, her dark eyes sparkling brightly and a faint flush tingeing the slight shade of tan on her child face.

"The duty of a knight and paternal weakness unfortunately still seal my lips," he answered. "Your Highness knows best that a lady's wish—even if she is your own child—is a command."

"You are praised as an obedient father," replied the Bohemian with a slight shrug of the shoulders. "Yet you probably need not conceal whether the

happy man, who is not only encouraged, but this time also chosen by the charming huntress of many kinds of game, is numbered among our guests."

"Unfortunately he is denied the pleasure, your Highness," replied the count; but Cordula, who had noticed Eva, and had heard the Duchess Agnes's last words, approached her royal foe, and with a low, reverential bow, said: "My poor heart must imagine him far away from here amid peril and privation. Instead of breaking ladies' hearts, he is destroying the castles of robber knights and disturbers of the peace of the country."

The duchess, in silent rage, clenched her white teeth upon her quivering lips, and was about to make an answer which would scarcely have flattered Cordula, when the Emperor, who had left his distinguished attendants, approached Eva, with the Burgravine still leaning on his arm.

She did not notice it; she was vainly trying to interpret the meaning of Cordula's words. True, she did not know that when no messenger brought Heinz Schorlin's intercession for Biberli, in whose fate the countess felt a sincere interest, she had commanded her own betrothed husband to ride his horse to death in order to tell the master of the sorely imperilled man what danger threatened his faithful servant, and remind him, in her name, that gratitude was one of the virtues which beseemed a true knight, even though the matter in question

concerned only a servant Boemund Altrosen had obeyed, and must have overtaken Heinz long ago, and probably aided him to rout the Siebenburgs and their followers. But Cordula read the young Bohemian's child heart, and it afforded her special pleasure to deal her a heavy blow in the warfare they were waging, which perhaps might aid another purpose.

The surprise and bewilderment which the countess's answer had aroused in Eva heightened the spell of her beauty.

Had she heard aright? Could Heinz really have sued for the countess's hand and been accepted? Surely, surely not! Neither was capable of such perfidy, such breach of faith. Spite of the testimony of her own ears, she would not believe it.

But when she at last saw the Emperor's tall figure before her, and he gazed down at her with a kind, fatherly glance, she answered it with her large blue eyes uplifted beseechingly, and withal as trustfully, as if she sought to remind him that, if he only chose to do so, his power made it possible to convert everything which troubled and oppressed her into good.

The tearful yet bright gaze of those resistless eyes pierced the Emperor's very soul, and he imagined how this lovely vision of purity and innocence, this rare creature, of whom he had heard such marvellous things from Herr Pfinzing during their ride through the forest, would have fired the

heart of his eighteen-year-old son, so sensitive to every impression, whom death had snatched from him so suddenly. And whilst remembering Hartmann, he also thought of his dead son's most loyal and dearest friend, Heinz Schorlin, who was again showing such prowess in his service, and had earned a right to recognition and reward.

He did not know his young favourite's present state of mind concerning his desire for a monastic life, but he had probably become aware that his swiftly kindled, ardent love for yonder lovely child had led him into an act of culpable imprudence. Besides, that very day many things had reached his ears concerning these two who suited each other as perfectly as Heinz Schorlin seemed—even to the Hapsburg, who was loyally devoted to the Holy Church—unfit for a religious life.

The Emperor could do much to further the union of this pair, yet he too was obliged to exercise caution. If he joined them in wedlock as though they were his own children he might be sure of causing loud complaints from the priesthood, and especially the Dominicans, who were very influential at the court of Rome—nay, he must be prepared for opposition directed against himself as well as the young pair. The prior of the order had already complained to the nuncio of the lukewarmness of the Superior of the Sisters of St. Clare, who idly witnessed the estrangement from the Church of the soul of a maiden belong-

ing to a distinguished family; and Doria had told the sovereign of this provoking matter, and expressed the prior's hope that Sir Heinz Schorlin, who enjoyed the monarch's favour, would be won for the monastic life. Opposition to this marriage, which he approved, and therefore desired to favour, was also to be expected from another quarter. Therefore he must act with the utmost caution, and in a manner which his antagonists could not oppose.

At this reflection a peculiar smile, familiar to the courtiers as an omen of a gracious impulse, hovered around his lips, which during the past month had usually revealed by their expression the grief that burdened his soul and, raising his long forefinger in playful menace, he began:

"Aha, Jungfrau Eva Ortlieb! What have you been doing since I had the boon of meeting so rare a beauty at the dance? Do you know that you have caused a turmoil amongst both ecclesiastical and secular authorities, and that many a precious hour has been shortened for me on your account? You have disturbed both the austere Dominican Fathers and the devout Sisters of St. Clare. The former think the gentle nuns treat you too indulgently, and the latter charge the zealous followers of St. Domingo with too much strictness concerning you.

"And, besides, if you were not so well aware of it yourself, you would scarcely believe it: for the

sake of an insignificant serving man, who is under your special protection, I, who carry the burden of so many serious and weighty affairs, am beset by those of high and low degree. How much, too, I have also suffered on account of his master, Sir Heinz Schorlin—again in connection with you, you lovely disturber of the peace! To say nothing of the rest, your own father brings a charge against him. The accusation is made in a letter which Meister Gottlieb, our protonotary, was to withhold by Herr Ortlieb's desire, but through a welcome accident it fell into my hands. This letter contains statements, my lovely child, which I—— Nay, don't be troubled; the roses on your cheeks are glowing enough already, and for their sake I will not mention its contents; only they force me to ask the question—come nearer—whether, though it caused you great annoyance that a certain young Swiss knight forced his way into your father's house under cover of the darkness, you do not hope with me, the more experienced friend, that this foolhardy fellow, misguided by ardent love, with the aid of the saints to whom he is beginning to turn, may be converted to greater caution and praiseworthy virtue? Whether, in your great charity—which I have heard so highly praised—you would be capable——"

Here he paused and, lowering his voice to a whisper, added:

"Do me the favour to lend your ear—what a

well-formed little thing it is!—a short time longer, to confide to the elderly man who feels a father's affection for you whether you would be wholly reluctant to attempt the reformation of the daring evil-doer yourself were he to offer, not only his heart, but the little ring with—I will guarantee it—his honourable, knightly hand?"

"Oh, your Majesty!" cried Eva, gazing at the gracious sovereign with an expression of such imploring entreaty in her large, tearful blue eyes that, as if regretting his hasty question, he added soothingly: "Well, well, we will reach the goal, I think, at a slower pace. Such a confession will probably flow more easily from the lips when sought by the person for whom it means happiness or despair, than when a stranger—even one as old and friendly as I—seeks to draw it from a modest maiden."

Here he paused; he had just recognised Lady Wendula Schorlin. Waving his hand to her in joyous greeting, he ordered a page to conduct her to him and, again turning to Eva, said: "Look yonder, my beautiful child: there is some one in whom you would confide more willingly than in me. I think Sir Heinz's mother, who is worthy of all reverence and love——"

Here surprise and joy forced from Eva's lips the question, "His mother?" and there was such amazement in the tone that, as the Lady Wendula, bowing low, approached the Emperor, after ex-

changing the first greetings which pass between old friends who have been long separated, he asked how it happened that though Eva seemed to have already met the matron, she heard with such surprise that she was the mother of his brave favourite.

Lady Wendula then confessed the name she had given herself, that she might study the young girl without being known; and again that peculiar smile flitted across the Emperor Rudolph's beardless face, and lingered there, as he asked the widow of his dead companion in arms whether, after such an examination, she believed she had found the right wife for her son; and she replied that a long life would not give her time enough to thank Heaven sufficiently for such a daughter.

The maiden who was the subject of this whispering, whose purport only a loving glance from the Lady Wendula revealed, pressed her hand upon her heart, whose impetuous throbbing stifled her breath. Oh, how gladly she would have hastened to the mother of the man she loved and his young sister, who stood at a modest distance, to clasp them in her arms, and confide to them what seemed too great, too much, too beautiful for herself alone, yet which might crumble at a single word from her lover's lips like an undermined tower swept away by the wind! But she was forced to have patience, and submit to whatever might yet be allotted to her.

Nor was she to lack agitating experiences, for the Emperor's murmured question whether she desired to hear herself called "daughter" by this admirable lady had scarcely called forth an answer which, though mute, revealed the state of her heart eloquently enough, than he added in a louder tone, though doubtfully: "Then, so far, all would be well; but, fair maiden, my young friend, unfortunately, was by no means satisfied, if I heard aright, with knocking at the door of a *single* heart. Things have reached my ears—— But this, too, must be——"

Here he suddenly paused, for already during this conversation with the ladies there had been a noise at the door of the hall, and now the person whom the Emperor had just accused entered, closely followed by the chamberlain, Count Ebenhofen, whose face was deeply flushed from his vain attempts to keep Sir Heinz Schorlin back.

Heinz's cheeks were also glowing from his struggle with the courtier, who considered it a grave offence that a knight should dare to appear before the Emperor at a peaceful social assembly clad in full armour.

His appearance created a joyful stir among the other members of the court—nay, in spite of the sovereign's presence, cordial expressions of welcome fell from the lips of ladies and nobles. The Bohemian princess alone cast an angry glance at the blue ribbon which adorned the helmet of the

returning knight; for "blue" was Countess von Montfort's colour, and "rose red" her own.

The ecclesiastics whom Heinz passed whispered eagerly together. The Duchess Agnes's confessor, an elderly Dominican of tall stature, was listening to the provost of St. Sebald's, a grey-haired man a head shorter than he, of dignified yet kindly aspect, who, looking keenly at Heinz, remarked: "I fear that your prior hopes too confidently to win yonder young knight. No one walks with that bearing who is on the eve of renouncing the world. A splendid fellow!"

"To whom armour is better suited than the cowl," observed the Bishop of Bamberg, a middle-aged prelate of aristocratic appearance, approaching the others. "Your prior, my dear brothers, would have little pleasure, I think, in the fish he is so eagerly trying to drag from the Minorite's net into his own. He would leap ashore again all too quickly. He is not fit for the monastery. He would do better for a priest, and I would bid him welcome as a military brother in office."

"Bold enough he certainly is," added the Dominican. "I would not advise every one to enter the Emperor's presence and this distinguished gathering in such attire."

In fact, Heinz showed plainly that he had come directly from the battlefield and the saddle, for a suit of stout chain armour, which covered the greater part of his tolerably long tunic, encased his limbs,

and even the helmet which he bore on his arm, spite of the blue ribbon that adorned it, was by no means one of the delicate, costly ones worn in the tournament. Besides, many a bruise showed that hard blows and thrusts had been dealt him.

CHAPTER XVIII.

At Heinz Schorlin's quarters the day before his young hostess, Frau Bärbel, had had the costly armour entrusted to her care, and the trappings belonging to it, cleaned and put in order, but her labour was vain; for Heinz Schorlin had ridden directly to the fortress from Schweinau, without stopping at his lodgings in the city.

Only a short time before he had learned that his two messengers had been captured and failed to reach their destination. He owed this information to Sir Boemund Altrosen—and many another piece of news which Cordula had given him.

The main portion of Heinz Schorlin's task was completed when the countess's ambassador reached him, so he set out on his homeward way at once, and this time his silent friend had been eloquent and told him everything which had occurred during his absence.

He now knew that Boemund and Cordula had plighted their troth, what the faithful Biberli had done and suffered for him, and lastly—even to the

minutest detail—the wonderful transformation in Eva.

When he had ridden forth he had hoped to learn to renounce her whom he loved with all the might of his fervid soul, and to bring himself to close his career as a soldier with this successful campaign; but whilst he destroyed castles and attacked the foe, former wishes were stilled, and a new desire and new convictions took their place. He could not give up the profession of arms, which all who bore the name of Schorlin had practised from time immemorial, and to resign the love which united him to Eva was impossible. She must become his, though she resembled an April day, and Biberli's tales of the danger which threatened the husband from a sleep-walking wife returned more than once to his memory.

Yet what beautiful April days he had experienced, and though Eva might have many faults, the devout child, with her angel beauty, certainly did not lack the will to do what was right and pleasing to God. When she was once his she should become so good that even his mother at home would approve his choice.

He had wholly renounced the idea of going into the monastery. The Minorite Ignatius, whom Father Benedictus had sent after him that he might finish the work which the latter had begun, was a man who lacked neither intellect nor eloquence; but he did not possess the fiery en-

thusiasm and aristocratic confidence of the dead man. Yet when the zealous monks, whom the prior of the Dominicans had despatched to complete Heinz's conversion, opposed him, the former entered into such sharp and angry arguments with them that the young knight, who witnessed more than one of their quarrels, startled and repelled, soon held aloof from all three and told them that he had resolved to remain in the world, and his onerous office gave him no time to listen to their well-meant admonitions.

He was not created for the monastery. If Heaven had vouchsafed him a miracle, it was done to preserve his life that—as Eva desired—he might fight to the last drop of his blood for the Church, his holy faith, and the beloved Emperor. But if he remained in the world, Eva would do the same; they belonged to each other inseparably. Why, he could not have explained, but the voice which constantly reiterated it could not lie.

After he had slain Seitz Siebenburg in the sword combat, and destroyed his brother's castle, his resolve to woo Eva became absolutely fixed.

His heart dictated this, but honour, too, commanded him to restore to the maiden and her sister the fair fame which his passionate impetuosity had injured.

During the rapid ride which he and Boemund Altrosen took to Nuremberg he had stopped at Schweinau hospital, and found in Biberli, Eva's

former enemy, her most enthusiastic panegyrist. Heinz also heard from him how quickly she had won the hearts of his mother and Maria, and that he would find all three at the fortress.

Lastly, Sister Hildegard had informed him of the great peril threatening his beloved faithful servant and companion, "old Biber," which had led Eva there to appeal to the Emperor.

Beside the body of Father Benedictus he learned how beautiful had been the death of the old man who had so honestly striven to lead him into the path which he believed was the right one for him to tread. In a brief prayer beside his devout friend Heinz expressed his gratitude, and called upon him to witness that, even in the world, he would not forget the shortness of this earthly pilgrimage, but would also provide for the other life which endured forever. True, Heinz had but a few short moments to devote to this farewell, the cause of the faithful follower who, unasked, had unselfishly endured unutterable tortures for him, took precedence of everything else and would permit no delay.

When the knight, with his figure drawn up to its full height, strode hastily into the royal hall, he beheld with joyful emotion those who were most dear to him, for whose presence he had longed most fervently during the ride—his mother, Eva, his sister, and the imperial friend he loved so warmly.

Overwhelmed by agitation, he flung himself on his knees before his master, kissing his hand and his robe, but the Emperor ordered him to rise and cordially greeted him.

Before speaking to his relatives, Heinz informed the monarch that he had successfully executed his commission and, receiving a few words of thanks and appreciation, modestly but with urgent warmth entreated the Emperor, if he was satisfied with his work, instead of any other reward, to save from further persecution the faithful servant who for his sake had borne the most terrible torture.

The face of the sovereign, who had welcomed Heinz as if he were a long-absent son, assumed a graver expression, and his tone seemed to vibrate with a slight touch of indignation, as he exclaimed: "First, let us settle your own affairs. Serious charges have been made against you, my son, as well as against your servant, on whose account I have been so tormented. A father, who is one of the leading men in this city, accuses you of having destroyed his daughter's good name by forcing yourself into his house after assuring his child of your love."

Heinz turned to Eva, to protest that he was here to atone for the wrong he had done her, but the Emperor would not permit him to speak. It was important to silence at once any objection which could be made against the marriage by ecclesiastical and secular foes; therefore, eagerly

as he desired to enjoy the happiness of the young pair, he forced himself to maintain the expression of grave dissatisfaction which he had assumed, and ordered a page to summon the imperial magistrate, the First Losunger of the city, and his protonotary, who were all amongst the guests, and, lastly, the Duchess Agnes.

He could read the latter's child eyes like the clear characters of a book, and neither the radiant glow on her face at Heinz Schorlin's entrance nor her hostile glance at the Countess von Montfort had escaped his notice. Both her affection and her jealous resentment should serve him.

The young Bohemian now thought herself certain that Heinz Schorlin, and no other, was Cordula's chosen knight; the countess, at his entrance, had exclaimed to her father loudly enough, "Here he is again!"

When the princess stood before the Emperor, with the gentlemen whom he had summoned, he asked her to decide the important question.

Yonder knight—he motioned towards Heinz—had been guilty of an act which could scarcely be justified. Though he had wooed the daughter of a noble Nuremberg family, and even forced his way into her father's house, he had apparently forgotten the poor girl.

"And," cried the young wife indignantly, "the unprincipled man has not only made a declaration of love to another, but formally asked her hand."

"That would seem like him," said the Emperor. "But we must not close our ears to the charge of the Nuremberg Honourable. His daughter, a lovely, modest maiden of excellent repute, has been seriously injured by Heinz Schorlin, and so I beg you, child, to tell us, with the keen appreciation of the rights and duties of a lady which is peculiar to you, what sentence, in your opinion, should be imposed upon Sir Heinz Schorlin to atone for the wrong he has done to the young Nuremberg maiden."

He beckoned to the protonotary, as he spoke, to command him to show Ernst Ortlieb's accusation to the duchess, but she seemed to have practised the art of reading admirably; for, more quickly than it would otherwise have appeared possible to grasp the meaning of even the first sentences, she exclaimed, drawing herself up to her full height and gazing at Cordula with haughty superiority: "There is but one decision here, if the morality of this noble city is to be preserved and the maiden daughters of her patrician families secured henceforward from the misfortune of being a plaything for the wanton levity of reckless heart-breakers. But this decision, on which I firmly and resolutely insist, as lady and princess, in the name of my whole sex and of all knightly men who, with me, prize the reverence and inviolable fidelity due a lady, is: Sir Heinz Schorlin must ask the honourable gentleman who, with full justice,

brought this complaint to your imperial Majesty, for his daughter's hand and, if the sorely injured maiden vouchsafes to accept it, lead her to the marriage altar before God and the world."

"Spoken according to the feelings of my own heart," replied the Emperor and, turning to the citizens of Nuremberg, he added: "So I ask you, gentlemen, who are familiar with the laws and customs of this good city and direct the administration of her justice, will such a marriage remove the complaint made against Sir Heinz Schorlin and his servant?"

"It will," replied old Herr Berthold Vorchtel, gravely and firmly.

Herr Pfinzing also assented, it is true, but added earnestly that an unfortunate meeting had caused another to suffer even more severely than Eva from the knight's imprudence. This was her older sister, the betrothed bride of young Eysvogel. For her sake, as well as to make the bond between Sir Heinz Schorlin and the younger Jungfrau Ortlieb valid, the father's consent was necessary. If his imperial Majesty desired to bring to a beautiful end, that very day, the gracious work so auspiciously commenced there was no obstacle in the way, for Ernst Ortlieb was at the von Zollern Castle with the daughter who had been so basely slandered.

The Emperor asked in surprise how they came there, and then ordered Eva's father and sister to

be brought to him. He was eager to make the acquaintance of the second beautiful E.

"And Wolff Eysvogel?" asked the magistrate. "We agreed to release him after we had turned our back on Nuremberg," replied the sovereign. "Much as we have heard in praise of this young man, gladly as we have shown him how gratefully we prize the blood a brave man shed for us upon the Marchfield, no change can be made in what, by virtue of our imperial word——"

"Certainly not, little brother," interrupted the court fool, Eyebolt, "but for that very reason you must open the Eysvogel's cage as quickly as possible and let him fly hither, for on the ride to the beekeeper's you crossed in your own seven-foot tall body the limits of this good city, whose length does not greatly surpass it—your imperial person, I mean. So you as certainly turned your back upon it as you stand in front of things which lie behind you. And as an emperor's word cannot have as much added or subtracted as a fly carries off on its tail, if it has one, you, little brother, are obliged and bound to have the strange monster, which is at once a wolf and a bird,* immediately released and summoned hither."

"Not amiss," laughed the Emperor, "if the boundaries of Nuremberg saw our back for even so brief a space as it needs to make a wise man a fool.

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* *Vogel* means bird.

We will follow your counsel, Eyebolt.—Herr Pfinzing, tell young Eysvogel that the Emperor's pardon has ended his punishment. The breach of the country's peace may be forgiven the man who so heroically aided the battle for peace."

Then turning to Meister Gottlieb, the protonotary, he whispered so low that he alone could hear the command, that he should commit to paper a form of words which would give the bond between Heinz Schorlin and Eva Ortlieb sufficient legal power to resist both secular authority and that of the Dominicans and Sisters of St. Clare.

During this conference court etiquette had prevented the company from exchanging any remarks. Whatever one person might desire to say to another he was forced to entrust to the mute language of the eyes, and a sportive impulse induced Em peror Rudolph to maintain the spell which held apart those who were most strongly attracted to each other.

Meantime, whilst he was talking with the protonotary, the bolder guests ventured to move about more freely, and of them all Cordula imposed the least restraint upon herself.

Ere Heinz had found time to address a word to Eva or to greet his mother she glided swiftly to his side and, with an angry expression on her face, whispered: "If Heaven bestowed the greatest happiness upon the most deserving, you must be the most favoured of mortals, for a more exquisite

masterpiece than your future wife—I know her—was never created. But now open your ears and follow my advice: Do not reveal the state of your heart until you have left the castle so far behind that you are out of sight of the Bohemian princess, or your ship of happiness may be wrecked within sight of port."

Then, with a well-assumed air of indignation, she abruptly turned her back upon him.

After moving away, she intentionally remained standing near the duchess, with drooping head. The latter hastily approached her, saying with admirably simulated earnestness: "You, Countess, will probably be the last to refuse your approval of my interference against our knightly butterfly and in behalf of the poor inexperienced girl, his victim."

"If that is your Highness's opinion," replied Cordula, shrugging her shoulders as if it were necessary to submit to the inevitable, "for my part I fear your kind solicitude may send me behind convent walls."

"Countess von Montfort a nun!" cried the child wife, laughing. "If it were Sir Heinz Schorlin to whom you just alluded, you, too, are among the deluded ones whom we must pity, yet with prudent foresight you provided compensation long ago. Instead of burying yourself in a convent, you, whom so many desire, would do better to beckon to one of your admirers and bestow on

him the happiness of which the other was not worthy."

Cordula fixed her eyes thoughtfully on the floor a short time, then, as if the advice had met with her approval, exclaimed: "Your Royal Highness's mature wisdom has found the right expedient this time also. I am not fit for the veil. Perhaps you may hear news of me to-morrow. By that time my choice will be determined. What would you say to the dark-haired Altrosen?"

"A brave champion!" replied the Bohemian, and this time the laugh which accompanied her words came from the heart. "Try him, in the name of all the saints! But look at Sir Heinz Schorlin! A gloomy face for a happy man! He does not seem quite pleased with our verdict."

She beckoned, as she spoke, to her chamberlain and the high steward, took leave of her imperial father-in-law and, with her pretty little head flung proudly back, rustled out of the hall.

Soon after Herr Pfinzing ushered Ernst Ortlieb, his daughter, and Wolff into the presence of the sovereign, who gazed as if restored to youth at the handsome couple whose weal or woe was in his hands. This consciousness afforded him one of the moments when he gratefully felt the full beauty and dignity of his responsible position.

With friendly words he restored Wolff's liberty, and expressed the expectation that, with such a

companion, he would raise the noble house of his ancestors to fresh prosperity.

When he at last turned to Heinz again he asked in a low tone: "Do you know what this day means to me?"

"Nineteen years ago it gave you poor Hartmann," replied the knight, his downcast eyes resting sadly on the floor.

The kind-hearted sovereign nodded significantly, and said, "Then it must benefit those who, so long as he lives, may expect his father's favour."

He gazed thoughtfully into vacancy and, faithful to his habit of fixing his eye on a goal, often distant, and then carefully carrying out the details which were to ensure success, ere he turned to the next one, he summoned the imperial magistrate and the First Losunger to his side.

After disclosing to them his desire to allow the judges to decide and, should the verdict go against Biberli, release him from punishment by a pardon, both undertook to justify the absence of the accused from the trial. The wise caution with which the Emperor Rudolph avoided interfering with the rights of the Honourable Council afforded old Herr Berthold Vorchtel great satisfaction. Both he and the magistrate, sure of the result, could promise that this affair, which had aroused so much excitement, especially among the artisans, would be ended by the marriage of the two Ortlieb sisters and the payment of the blood money to the wound-

ed tailor. Any new complaint concerning them would then be lawfully rejected by both court and magistrate.

Never had Heinz thanked his imperial benefactor more warmly for any gift, but though the Emperor received his gallant favourite's expressions of gratitude and appreciation kindly, he did not yet permit him to enjoy his new happiness. .

There were still some things which must be decided, and for the third time his peculiar smile showed the initiated that he was planning some pleasant surprise for those whom it concerned.

The mention of the blood money which Herr Ernst Ortlieb owed the slandering tailor, who had not yet recovered from his wound, induced the Emperor to look at the father of the beautiful sisters.

He knew that Herr Ernst had also lost a valiant son in the battle of Marchfield, and Eva's father had been described as an excellent man, but one with whom it was difficult to deal. Now, spite of the new happiness of his children, the sovereign saw him glance gloomily, as if some wrong had been done him, from his daughters to Heinz, and then to Lady Schorlin and Maria, to whom he had not yet been presented. He doubtless felt that the Emperor had treated him and his family with rare graciousness, and was entitled to their warmest gratitude yet, as a father and a member of the proud and independent Honourable Council of the

free imperial city of Nuremberg, he considered his rights infringed—nay, it had cost him a severe struggle not to protest against such arbitrary measures. He had his paternal rights even here—Els and Eva were not parentless orphans.

The noble monarch and shrewd judge of human nature perceived what was passing in the Nuremberg merchant's mind, but the pleasant smile still rested on his lips as, with a glance at the ill-humoured Honourable, he exclaimed to his future son-in-law: "I have just remembered something, Heinz, which might somewhat cool your warm expressions of gratitude. Yonder lovely child consented to become yours, it is true, but that does not mean very much, for it was done without the consent of her father, by which the compact first obtains signature and seal. Herr Ernst Ortlieb, however, seems to be in no happy mood. Only look at him! He is certainly mutely accusing me of vexatious interference with his paternal rights, and yet he may be sure that I feel a special regard for him. His son's blood, which flowed for his Emperor's cause, gives him a peculiar claim upon our consideration, and we therefore devoted particular attention to his complaint. In this he now demands, my son, that you restore to him, Herr Ernst Ortlieb, the two hundred silver marks which are awarded to the tailor as blood money and he must pay to the injured artisan. The prudent business man can scarcely be blamed

for making this claim, for the wound he inflicted upon the ill-advised tradesman who so basely insulted those dearest to him would certainly not have been dealt had not your insolent intrusion into the Ortlieb mansion unchained evil tongues. So, Heinz, you caused his hasty act, and therefore are justly bound to answer for the consequences. If he brings the accusation, the judges will condemn you to pay the sum. I therefore ask whether you have it ready."

Here Herr Ernst attempted to explain that, in the present state of affairs, there could be no further mention of a payment which was only intended to punish the disturber of his domestic peace more severely; but the Emperor stopped him and bade Heinz speak.

The latter gazed in embarrassment at the helmet he held in his hand, and had not yet found a fitting answer when the Emperor cried: "What am I to think? Was the Duke of Pomerania wrong when he told me of a heap of gold——"

"No, Your Majesty" Heinz here interrupted without raising his eyes. "What was left of that money would have more than sufficed to cover the sum required——"

"I thought so!" exclaimed the sovereign without letting him finish; "for a young knight who, like a great lord, bestows a fine estate upon the pious Franciscans, certainly need only command his treasurer to open the strong box——"

"You are mocking me, Your Majesty," Heinz quietly interposed. "You are doubtless well aware whence the golden curse came to me. I thrust it aside like noxious poison, and if I am reluctant to use it to buy, as it were, what is dearest and most sacred to me, indeed it does not spring from parsimony, for I had resolved to offer the two remaining purses to the devout Sisters of St. Clare and the zealous Minorite Brothers, one of the best of whom laboured earnestly for the salvation of my soul."

"That is right, my son," fell from the Emperor's lips in a tone of warm approval. "If the gold benefits the holy poverty of these pious Brothers and Sisters, the devil's gift may easily be transformed into a divine blessing. You both"—he gazed affectionately at Heinz and Eva as he spoke—"have, as it were, deserted the cloister, and owe it compensation. But your depriving yourself of your golden treasure, my friend—for two hundred silver marks are no trifle to a young knight—puts so different a face upon this matter that—that——"

Here he lowered his voice and continued with affectionate mirthfulness—"that a friend must determine to do what he can for him. True, my gallant Heinz, I see that your future father-in-law, the other Nuremberg Honourables, and even your mother, are ready to pay the sum; but he who is most indebted to you holds fast this privi-

lege, and that man am I, my brave champion! What you did for your Emperor and his best work, the peace of the country, deserves a rich reward and, thanks to the saints, I have something which will discharge my debt. The Swabian fief of Reichenbach became vacant. It has a strong citadel, from which we command you to maintain the peace of the country and overthrow robber knights. This fief shall be yours. You can enjoy it with your dear wife. It must belong to your children and children's children forever; for that a Schorlin should be born who would be unworthy of such a fief and faithless to his lord and Emperor seems to me impossible. Three villages and broad forests, with fields and meadows, pertain to the estate. As lord of Reichenbach, it will be easy for you to pay the blood money, if your father-in-law is not too importunate a creditor.

The latter certainly would not be that, and it cost Ernst Ortlieb no effort to bend the knee gratefully before the kindly monarch.

The Emperor Rudolph accepted the homage, but he clasped the young lord of Reichenbach to his heart like a beloved son, and as he placed Eva's hand in his, and she raised her beautiful face to him, he stooped and kissed her with fatherly kindness.

When Wolff entreated him to bless his alliance, in the place of his suffering father, he did so

gladly; and Els also willingly offered him her lips, when he requested the same favour her sister had granted him, that he might boast of the kisses bestowed on him by the two beautiful Es, Nuremberg's fairest maidens.

CHAPTER XIX.

Heinz heeded Cordula's warning. In the royal hall every one would have been justified in believing him a very cool lover, but during the walk with Eva to the lodgings of his cousin Maier of Silenen, where the Schorlins, Ortliebs, Wolff, and Herr Pfinzing and his wife were to meet to celebrate the betrothal, the moon, whose increasing crescent was again in the sky, beheld many things which gave her pleasure.

The priest soon united Heinz and Eva, but the celestial pilgrim willingly resigned the power formerly exerted over the maiden to the husband, who clasped her to his heart with tender love.

Luna was satisfied with Wolff and Els also. She afterwards watched the fate of both couples in Swabia and Nuremberg, and when the showy escutcheon was removed from the Eysvogel mansion, and a more modest one put in its place, she was gratified.

She soon saw that a change had also been made in the one above the door of the Ortlieb house, for the Ortlieb coat of arms, in accordance with the

family name, had borne the figure of a cat, the animal which loves the place,* the house to which it belongs, but on the wedding day of the two beautiful Es the Emperor Rudolph had commanded that, in perpetual remembrance of its two loveliest daughters, the Ortliebs should henceforward bear on their escutcheon two linden leaves under tendrils, the symbol of loyal steadfastness.

When, a few months after Wolff's union with his heart's beloved, the coffin of old Countess Rotterbach, adorned with a handsome coronet upon the costly pall, was borne out of the house at the quiet evening hour, she thought there was no cause to mourn.

On the other hand, she grieved when, for a long time, she did not see old Casper Eysvogel, whose tall figure she had formerly watched with pleasure when, at a late hour, he returned from some banquet, his bearing erect, and his step as firm as if wine could not get the better of him. But suddenly one warm September noon, when her pale, waxing crescent was plainly visible in the blue sky by daylight, she beheld him again. He was less erect than before, but he seemed content with his fate; for, as a cooler breeze waved the light cobwebs in the little garden, into which he had been led, his daughter-in-law Els with loving care wrapped his feet in the rug which she had

* *Ort*, place.

embroidered for him with the Eysvogel coat of arms, and he gratefully kissed her brow.

It was fully ten years later that Luna saw him also borne to the grave. Frau Rosalinde, his son, and his beautiful wife followed his coffin with sincere sorrow. The three gifted children whom Els had given to her Wolff remained standing in front of the house with Frau Rickel, their nurse. The carrier's widow, who had long since regained her health in the Beguine House at Schweinau, had been taken into Frau Eysvogel's service. Her little adopted daughter Walpurga, scarcely seventeen years old, had just been married to the Ortlieb teamster Ortel. The moon heard the nurse tell what a pleasant, quiet man Herr Casper had been, and how, away from his own business affairs and those of the Council, his sole effort had seemed to be to interfere with no one.

The moon had forgotten to look at Frau Rosalinde. Besides, after her mother's death she was rarely seen even by the members of her own household, but when Els desired to seek her she was sure of finding her with the children. The parents willingly afforded her the pleasure she derived from the companionship of the little ones, but they were often obliged to oppose her wish to dress her grandchildren magnificently.

Frau Rosalinde rarely saw the twin sons of her daughter Isabella, who took the veil after her husband's death to pray for his sorely imperilled soul.

The Knight Heideck, the uncle and faithful teacher of the boys, was unwilling to let them go to the city. He ruled them strictly until they had proved that Countess Cordula's wish had been fulfilled and, resembling their unfortunate father only in figure and beauty, strength and courage, they had grown into valiant, honourable knights.

Wolff justified the expectations of Berthold Vorchtel and the Honourable Council concerning his excellent ability. When, eight years after he undertook the sole guidance of the business, the Reichstag again met in Nuremberg, it was the house of Eysvogel which could make the largest loan to the Emperor Rudolph, who often lacked necessary funds.

At the Reichstag of the year 1289, whose memory is shadowed by many a sorrowful incident, most of the persons mentioned in our story met once more.

Countess Cordula, now the happy wife of Sir Boemund Altrosen, had also come and again lodged in the Ortlieb house. But this time the only person whose homage pleased her was the grey-haired, but still vigorous and somewhat irascible Herr Ernst Ortlieb.

The Abbess Kunigunde alone was absent. When, after many an arduous conflict, especially with the Dominicans, who did not cease to accuse her of lukewarmness, she felt death approaching, she had summoned her darling Eva from Swabia,

and the young wife's husband, who never left her save when he was wielding his sword for the Emperor, willingly accompanied her to Nuremberg.

With Eva's hand clasped in hers, and supported by Els, the abbess died peacefully, rich in beautiful hopes. How often she had described such an end to her pupil as the fairest reward for the sacrifices in which convent life was so rich! But the memory of her mother's decease had brought to Eva, while in Schweinau, the firm conviction that dwellers in the world were also permitted to find a similar end. The Saviour Himself had promised the crown of eternal life to those who were faithful unto death, and she and her husband maintained inviolable fidelity to the Saviour, to each other, and to every duty which religion, law, and love commanded them to fulfil. Therefore, why should they not be permitted to die as happily and confidently as her aunt, the abbess?

Her life was rich in happiness, and though Heinz Schorlin as a husband and father, as the brave and loyal liegeman of his Emperor, and the prudent manager of his estate, regained his former light-heartedness, and taught his wife to share it, both never forgot the painful conflict by which they had won each other.

When Eva passed the village forge and saw the smith draw the glowing iron from the fire and, with heavy hammer strokes, fashion it upon the anvil as he desired, she often remembered the

grievous days after her mother's death, which had made the "little saint"—she did not admit it herself, but the whole Swabian nobility agreed in the opinion—the most faithful of wives and mothers, the Providence of the poor, the zealous promoter of goodness, the most simply attired of noblewomen far and near, yet the most aristocratic and distinguished in her appearance of them all.

Hand in hand with her husband she devoted the most faithful care to their children, and if Biberli, the castellan of the castle, and Kätterle his wife, who had remained childless, were too ready to read the wishes of their darlings in their eyes, she exclaimed warningly to the loyal old friend, "The fire of the forge!" He and Kätterle knew what she meant, for the ex-schoolmaster had explained it in the best possible way to his docile wife.

THE END.

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